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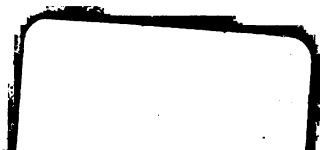
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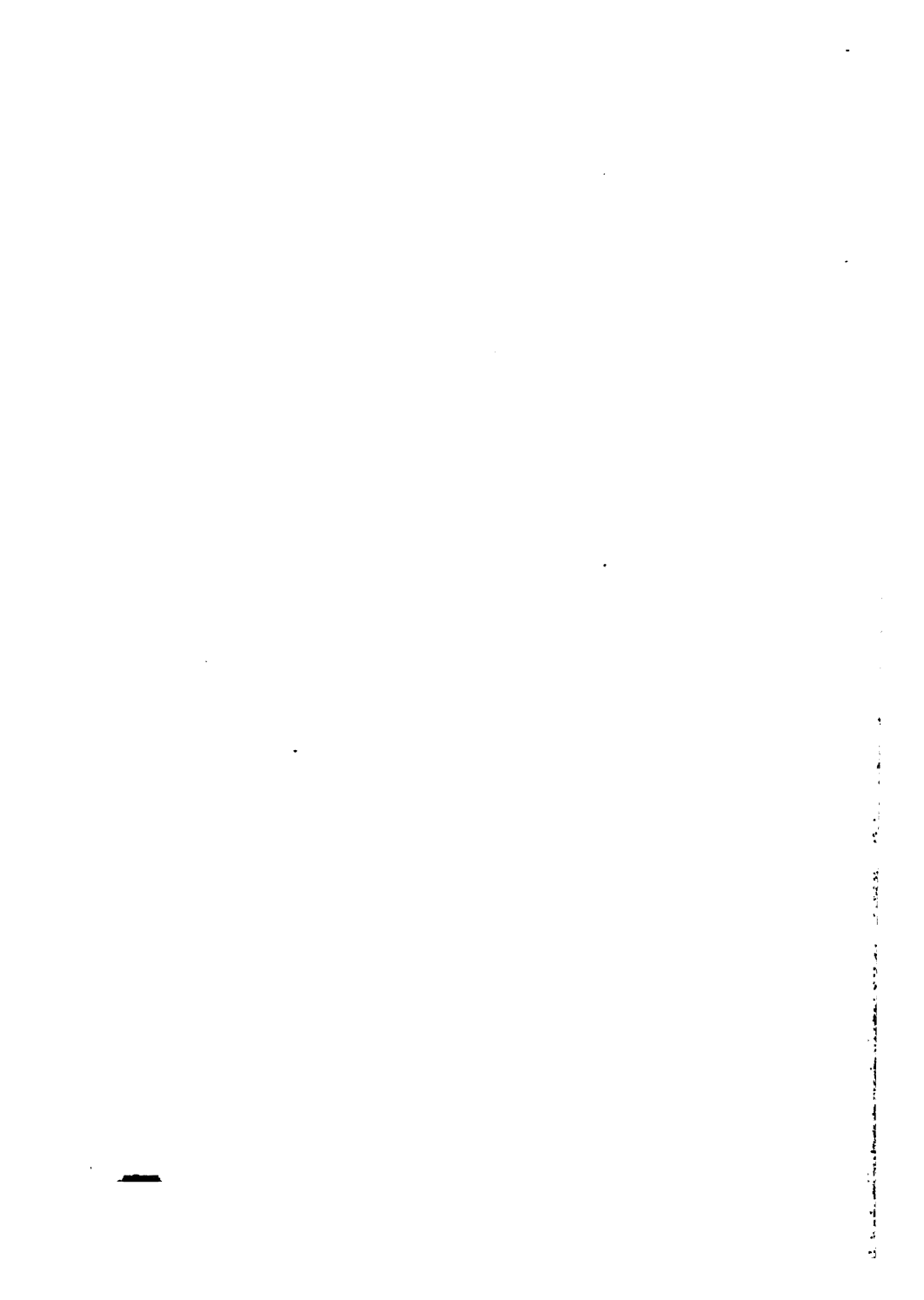
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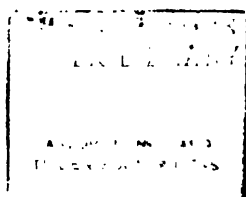




Smith

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE







THE AUTHOR FRYING PICKEREL IN CAMP
(See Chapter XIII)

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE

BY
O. W. SMITH

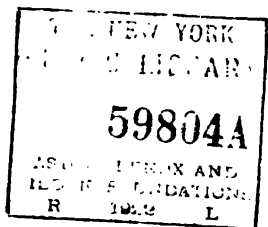
Angling Editor "Outdoor Life,"
Author of "Trout Lore," "Casting Tackle and Methods," etc.



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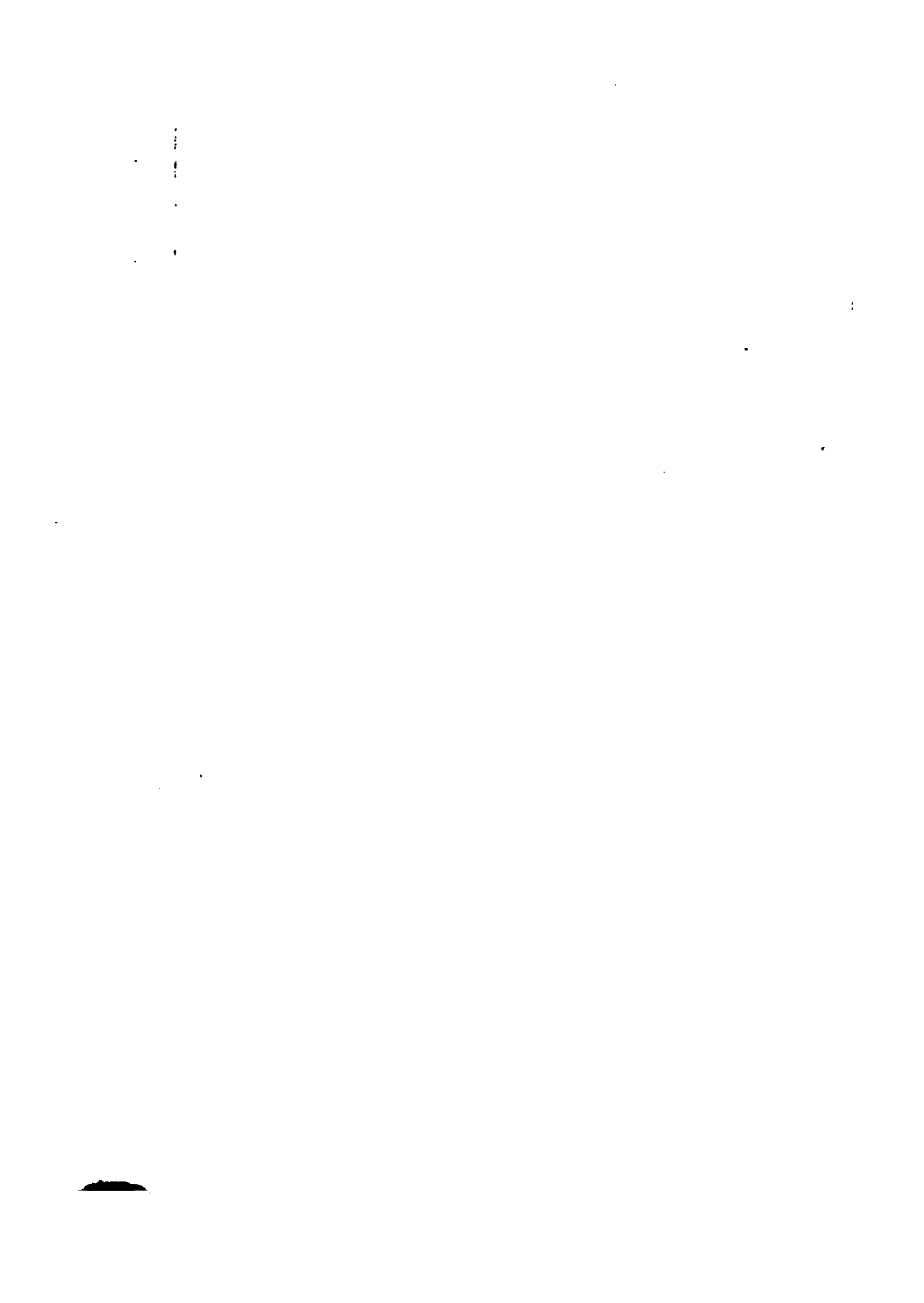
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TO
"CHUM" AND "JUNIOR NIMROD,"
WIFE AND DAUGHTER,

Who have borne with the whims, fancies and idiosyncrasies
of a dyed-in-the-wool-angler, this little book
is most affectionately dedicated

1911
November - July 17/22.



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THE AUTHOR FRYING PICKEREL IN CAMP, *Frontispiece*

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FOREWORD

TO ALL MY GOOD FRIENDS OF THE ANGLE, GREETING:

I come to you with another fishing book, not because of any particular fitness of myself for the task; rather, because there is so much need for the work. So far as I know, there is no American book dealing exclusively with the pikes, a family, by the way, which I think has not received its just due from the great host of anglers and angling writers. Of course the muskellunge has always been given an honorable place among the fresh-water fish of the world, but I undertake to prove that there is a place for even the despised pickerel in the ichthyic scheme of things; furthermore, that on suitable tackle he is a foeman worthy of any angler's skill. But read the chapter "The Little Pickerels." The reader will find the subdivision "Fly-Fishing for Pickerel" something of a revelation I am sure. Right here I ask the reader's careful and charitable consideration of any new and original methods of angling described or advocated. Do not judge hastily or without some experimentation along the lines suggested. In other words, do not damn me without something further than a hearing.

Scientific diagnosis of species is gone into with some care, for the matter of when a pike is a great pike or muskellunge, and not a pickerel, is a question that is asked over and over again. I think anyone can readily see that a pike as a great pike is just as much of a

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game fish as when he is a muskellunge. Unfortunately, this matter will never be settled satisfactorily for all, because certain anglers maintain that a lunge is a better fighter than a great pike. Resort keepers are insisting that their fish are lunge, when in fact they are great pike. Now the truth of the matter is, there is just as much sport in playing a thirty-five-pound great pike as there is in playing a muskellunge of the same weight.

At first I proposed to call the common pike, the fish most widely distributed of the whole family, *Esox lucius* (Great Lake's pike), but a little reflection convinced me that such a name would be too cumbersome to be popular. Neither is it descriptive of a fish so widely distributed, for *lucius* is the pike found the world round. After much thought I came to the conclusion that "great pike" would be descriptive, dignified, easy to use, and altogether happy. In reply to a question, Mr. Evermann, one of the authors of "American Food and Game Fishes," said that he regarded "great pike" as a very good name indeed for a fish regarding which there is more than a little confusion. Perhaps, too, the name, being a wee bit more high-sounding than mere "pike," will lead the anglers to feel that in catching great pike they are catching a fish worth while, and not a pickerel. A great pike is a great pike from minnowhood up, even as a pickerel remains a pickerel, and a 'lunge a 'lunge all the days of their existence.

What confusion there is regarding the whole pike family!—a confusion that has been accentuated by the entrance of a fish that absolutely has no relationship with the pikes: I refer to the so-called "wall-eyed

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pike," which is not a pike, but a perch, as its book name, "pike-perch," indicates. However, the book name has nothing but its truthfulness to recommend it; it is not exactly descriptive and far from easy to use. I have urged from the platform and through my pages in *Outdoor Life* the past several years that we call the fish "wall eye," an easy name to use and sufficiently descriptive. Leave the "pike" off always. When we say "pike," always mean pike and nothing else.

There is the so-called great northern pike, the gray muskellunge of a few Wisconsin and Minnesota lakes. Now he is no more the "true lunge," as some assert, than is his close relative, the Ohio or Great Lakes fish, some writers and fishermen to the contrary notwithstanding. Call him "northern pike" if you want to, but oh, I beg of you, never call the wall-eye a pike!

I have enjoyed the gathering together of these chapters even as I enjoyed their first preparation for the pages of *Outdoor Life*, and I may as well here as anywhere make my bow to that good magazine for the privilege of republication in book form. Also I desire to thank *Forest and Stream* for permission to publish in the appendix the chapter on hybridism of pike and pickerel, for it first appeared under my name in that magazine and brought me many letters from all over the country; therefore it seemed wise to me that it should appear in this, the first American book treating exclusively of the pike family.

Much of the matter is original, as the reader will discover, and many of the first chapters that appeared in *Outdoor Life* have been thoroughly rewritten. I have not hesitated to change pages and paragraphs as

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necessity has arisen. The book is true to facts in so far as I can make it so. That no errors have crept in I will not say, for "to err is human," you know. Simply I have tried to produce a safe guide for the anglers who seek one great group of our fresh-water fishes. Whether or not I have done my work well, I leave the reader-fisherman and the fisherman-scientist to judge.

I can say in utmost truth that this has been a work of love, for I dearly love to catch fish and write of the fish I catch. I have tried to get the reader to see that not merely the science of the subject, nor the important matter of tackle, nor yet the successful taking of fish has been my lodestar, but that the getting out into God's Out-o'-Doors, where the free breezes blow and the flowers tone and scent the air, has been the thing of utmost importance. I hold myself to be a sort of preacher, a preacher of the gospel of the Out-o'-Doors. What we need in this day and age is more men going to the woods and waters for doubt's anodyne and care's surcease. There is such a thing as the Religion of the Open, and it is not mere Godless pantheism, either.

Perhaps some will criticize me for spinning so many yarns, casting my information so often in story form; but to them I can only say, "It is not all of fishing to fish." I turn from many of our American writers to our English cousins, for they take time, some of them, to see the flowers and hear the birds sing. I have related many an incident, each one, however, I think the reader will agree with me teaches some concrete lesson, presses home some angling truth. While I have no desire that this book become "popular," I have tried to write it in a popular style, though I have

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studiously avoided slang and vulgarity. I have tried to be dignified, yet companionable. I hope I have produced a book that readers will pick up long after the streams and lakes of the Middle West shall know me not, and say *not* "He was an ichthyologist of parts," nor, "He was a great angler," but, "He loved the woods and waters."

In conclusion, let me thank all the correspondents everywhere who have helped me build this book. Especially would I thank the picture-takers, particularly the men of the New York Fish Commission for the use of the pictures of Chautauqua muskellunge. Whenever possible full credit is given.

So I hand the volume over to you, reader. May the fire leap high and the Red Gods smile upon you.

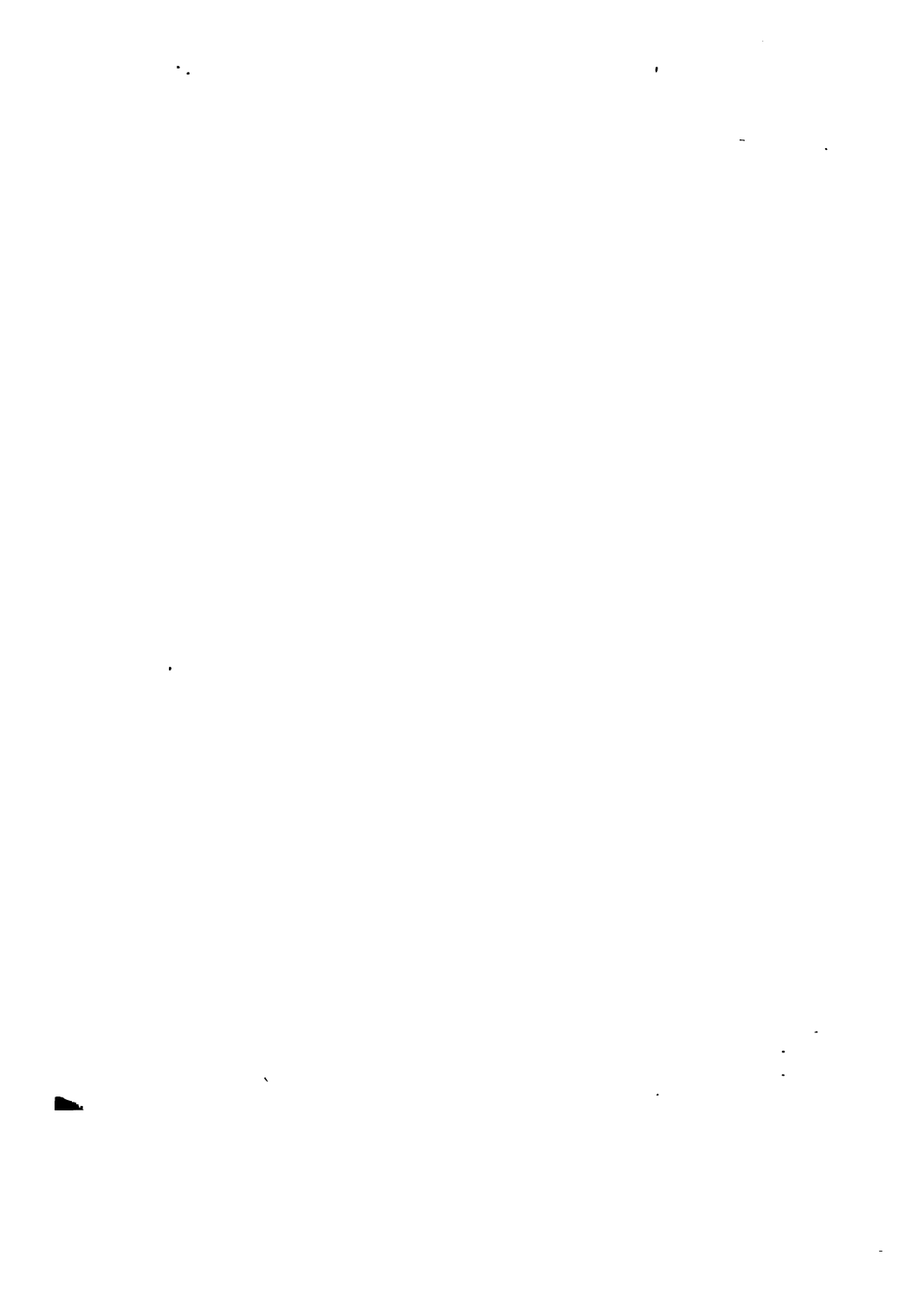
THE AUTHOR.

Evansville, Wisconsin.

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE

"The pike family are most remarkable for the large size of the head which is flattened and the lower jaw which projects. They have a terrible array of sharp teeth of assorted sizes, and on the edge of each side of the lower jaw are several long, bayonet-shaped fangs—in the larger fish nearly an inch long, some of them curved inward like the tusks of a bear."

—Mr. Louis Rhead, in "The Book of Fish and Fishing."



CHAPTER I

By Way of Introduction

DURING the years in which I have filled an angling editor's chair no single topic has elicited more questions than has the pike family. To go through my correspondence files amply proves the statement. In one month during a certain summer no less than sixty-three letters appeared upon my desk, their subjects ranging from the time-worn question, "What is the difference between a pickerel and a muskellunge?" and "Which is the best time of the year for muskellunge fishing?" If I were to add the questions regarding the relationship of the "wall-eyed pike" (pike-perch) to the pike family, I would almost double the number. Now I have answered the same questions over and over again. Still the stream does not diminish; rather, is gradually on the increase. Consequently I am convinced that there is real need for an American work upon the subject.

It is my purpose to go into the matter as exhaustively as possible, not only treating of the various members of the family and the literature of the subject, but also writing of tackle and the methods of employing it; in fact, it is my purpose to prepare a work that shall obviate once for all, the answering of multitudinous queries. The reader will realize that it is no small task I have assigned myself. However, the greater the labor expended the greater the reward.

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE

Life's profits are always in exact ratio to investments. The thing which costs nothing is nothing worth, a statement which applies not only to angling lore, but to material things and mental wealth as well.

The angler's success is always in proportion to his knowledge and skill. While I realize the importance of tackle, am the proud possessor of some valuable rods and reels of various makes, I wish to reassert, "The angler's success is always in proportion to his knowledge and skill." Any man can catch fish when the water teems with hungry game, but only a habit-wise and skill-wise handler of rod and reel can secure a good string of muskellunge when those fish are few and far between, therefore shy and wary passing belief. A man may be a "lucky fisherman" now and again, but if his luck continues week in and week out, season in and season out, you may rightly conclude that fish-knowledge and skill with tackle, rather than the fickle jade Luck, are the secret of the success. Luck may be a good mare for a spurt, but she is a poor beast for a steady up-hill climb.

Perhaps I shall step on some brother's ichthyic corns before I have finished with the pikes; it will be strange if I do not, for every angler is possessed of sensitive spots. When I come to write of the little grass pickerel, that "snake" of sluggish water, as a game fish, some will rise up in righteous wrath; and when I laud fly-fishing for pickerel as a sport worthy the consideration of any descendant of Izaak Walton, some, I am sure, will lift hands of piscatorial horror. Oh, I realize full well, none better, what I am letting myself in for. Still I must, here in my introduction, insist that the little pickerel has not received his

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

proper due at the hands of anglers and angling writers. He is not as black, not as green rather, as he has been painted from time immemorial. On suitable tackle he is a foeman worthy of any angler's skill. "On suitable tackle." Therein lies the secret.

It shall be my purpose, so far as in me lies, not to lose sight of the fascination of this particular sport; to emphasize the æsthetical, if the reader will allow that somewhat effeminately flavored word. I fuss with the average angling writer. His instructions are about as interesting as an array of vital statistics. I could never understand why the attractivity of the sport, the lure of the open, the blandishment of God's Out-o'-Doors, should not have place even in a book on tackle and how to use it. We do not fish just for fish, in all conscience. So if I stop to gather moccasin flowers while fly-fishing for pickerel, or leave the boat to collect highly colored autumn leaves when casting for the fighting muskellunge, don't find fault. Why should I be other than I am, even in a book? He who angles with me must become accustomed to my habits, my idiosyncracies, or we will speedily dissolve partnership. I have always held that flower-gathering and bird-study are an important part of fishing; and whether I am fishing for aristocratic trout or plebeian pickerel, I take time to become acquainted with my surroundings.

Then, too, what other anglers have said about fishing, history and literature, must play its part. Pike fishing is an ancient pastime, and there is considerable literature upon the subject, especially Old World literature, for in England the pike is more highly thought of than he is upon this side the briny. Be it said, however, upon this side there has no work

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appeared, so far as I know, dealing exclusively with the family. Much has been written of the lordly muskellunge. It is a "lordly fish," if we are to believe the magazine writers, and we will not disagree with them; but if the muskellunge is a noble fish, why, in the name of all that is reasonable, is not the great pike—by which name I propose to designate the large pike we all know—just as noble, pound for pound? That the muskellunge, pound for pound, is one whit more gamy than the great pike I will not for a moment admit. So you see, I may get into trouble right here in the introduction.

What I hope to do, in addition to giving some information on tackle and methods of angling, is to help clear up the matter of names; enable the angler to tell the difference between pickerel, pike, and muskellunge, impressing upon him over and over again that the so-called "wall-eyed pike" is not a pike at all, but a perch; tell him what I have learned of the habits of the various pikes, and of the tackle employed for their capture. It is a "large order," and it will take some time to fill it, but we have all the time there is.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER II

Literature and History

"The mighty Luce or Pike is taken to be the Tyrant, as the Salmon is the King, of the fresh waters. 'Tis not to be doubted but that they are bred, some by generation and some not: as, namely, of a weed called Pickerel-weed, unless learned Gesner be much mistaken: for he says, this weed and other glutinous matter, with the help of the Sun's heat in some particular months, and some ponds apted for it by nature, do become Pike. But doubtless divers Pikes are bred after this manner, or are brought into some ponds some such other ways as are past man's finding out, of which we have daily testimonies."—*The Compleat Angler*.

IN comparison with the Old World, there is a dearth of American literature upon the subject of the pike family; indeed, I know of no single work dealing with the pickerel, pike, and muskellunge alone. Here and there, as in McCarthy's "Familiar Fish," Rhead's "The Book of Fish and Fishing," Henshall's "Favorite Fish and Fishing" and "Bass, Pike, Perch and Other Game Fishes of America," Rhead's "Bait Angling for Common Fishes," Dixie Carroll's "Lake and Stream Fishing," and books of that ilk, we find short chapters dealing with one or all members of the family, but that is about all. Upon the scientific side of the question we find such brief articles as those in Jordan and Evermann's "American Food and Game Fishes" and Goode's "American Fishes." Then there are bulletins from the United States Fish Commission and those states that have undertaken to propagate the pikes. Good as all the foregoing are, they are not complete enough to satisfy

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the inquisitive angler, much less the angling literatus who derives almost as much enjoyment from angling in books as in fishing in lakes and streams.

Upon the other side of the water, the pike (for they do not have the small pickerel and muskellunge) is much honored, is fin and scale a part of folklore and legend; indeed, as one digs into the cobwebby past, it is exceedingly difficult to separate fact from fancy. Cholmondeley-Pennell's "Book of the Pike" and "Trolling for Pike, Salmon, and Trout," the first issued in 1865, the latter somewhat later, are well worth the American angler's time and money, e'en though he must look in second-hand stores for them. William Senior's "Pike and Perch," a volume of the well-known "Fur, Fin, and Feather" series, an English work issued on both sides of the water, is as complete a thing as I know, a single chapter upon "Some Foreign Relatives," treating of our purely American pikes. John Bickerdyke's "Angling for Pike" is another English work worth having, as is "Pike and Other Coarse Fish," by Cholmondeley-Pennell, a volume of the Badminton Library. In fact, there are so many English books, some of them *very* English, that I cannot mention them all here; but I think I have enumerated a sufficient number to prove to the curious or interested American angler that he need not lack for information in so far as the Old World pike is concerned. Be it said, however, that we Americans would not agree with the directions given in the English books for pike angling.

So ancient are the early mentions of pike and pike fishing and, as pointed out at the commencement of the foregoing paragraph, so interwoven is legend with

LITERATURE AND HISTORY

fact, that it is extremely difficult to tell where one leaves off and the other begins. That Izaak Walton, that Nestor of anglers, believed many odd things regarding this "Tyrant" is true, to-wit, his statement that undoubtedly the fish is sometimes the offspring of common pickerel weed. When he tells of two young geese being found at one time in the stomach of a pike, we are somewhat staggered; but when he soberly affirms "A Pike, in his height of hunger, will bite at and devour a dog that swims in a pond," we have a faint suspicion that perhaps the gentle Izaak was a wee bit too credulous, e'en though he adds earnestly, "I might say more of this, but it might be thought curiosity or worse." Evidently even in his day a fisherman's "yarns" were regarded with some suspicion.

One of the most weird bits of "information" he gives us is the following, which he credits to Dubravius, a bishop of Bohemia, who wrote a book upon "Of Fish and Fish Ponds," and Walton says, asserts he saw with his own eyes. I quote verbatim:

"As he [Dubravius] and the Bishop Thurzo were walking by a large pond in Bohemia they saw a Frog, when the Pike lay very sleepily and quiet by the shore-side, leap upon his head, and the Frog, having expressed malice or anger by his swollen cheeks and staring eyes, did stretch out his legs and embrace the Pike's head and presently reached them to his eyes, tearing with them and his teeth those tender parts; the Pike, moved with anguish, moves up and down the water and rubs himself against weeds and whatever he thought might quit him of his enemy; but all in vain, for the Frog did continue to ride triumphantly and to

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE

bite and torment the Pike till his strength failed, and then the Frog sunk with the Pike to the bottom of the water; then presently the Frog appeared again at the top and croaked, and seemed to rejoice like a conqueror, after which he presently retired to his secret hole. The Bishop, that had beheld the battle, called his fisherman to fetch his nets, and by all means to get the Pike, that they might declare what had happened: and the Pike was drawn forth, and both his eyes eaten out, at which when they began to wonder, the fisherman wished them to forbear, and assured them he was certain that Pikes were often so served."

If we are to accept as fact the legendary ichthyic history of England, then we must believe that a mule, bending to drink at a stream, was bitten through the lip by a pugnacious pike, which would not loose its hold, but was drawn from the water. Furthermore, it must have been extremely hazardous to bathe in English pike water in the long ago, for was not a maid, busy with her mistress' washing, seized by the foot? Perhaps here is the reason for the modern Englishman's love for his "tub:" he is fearful of open water. I am surprised that Darwin never elaborated it. But cheer up; worse is yet to come.

To write of pike in literature and not mention the famous Kaiserweg Lake fish would be to commit an ichthyic unpardonable sin. Before he mentions the fish from "Swedeland," Walton, with all the canniness of a Scot, tells us that Sir Francis Bacon thought that a pike might live to be forty years old. Then he proceeds to tell of the fish that was put into Kaiserweg Lake by one of the German emperors and there lived some two hundred and sixty-seven years. Just how

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much truth there may be in the yarn I am unable to determine, but it appears in every English angling work upon pike read by me. Personally, I regard it as highly apocryphal. Yet Mr. Cholmondeley-Pennell, in his book mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, not only relates the story, but also gives a facsimile of the ring worn by the fish, with the following translation of its Greek inscription:

"I am the fish which was first of all put into this lake by the hands of the Governor of the Universe, Frederick II, Oct. 5, 1230."

As the talented author remarks, it is somewhat strange that the engraving found in the old black-letter copy of Gesner's famous work, published in Heidelberg, A. D. 1606, should have escaped discovery for so many years. We are expected to believe that this fish grew to the prodigious length of nineteen feet and reached the not inconsiderable weight of 350 pounds! Advocate of light tackle though I am, I am not altogether sure that I would be willing to try conclusions with that *minnow*, even with my heavy bass rod, which weighs seven ounces. Unfortunately for the story, the skeleton, which was for a number of years preserved in the Cathedral of Mannheim, was found, by a shrewd anatomist acquainted with the bones of a fish, to have been lengthened by artificial means to agree with the story. But why investigate too thoroughly? Has it been altogether a gain to discover that Pocahontas did not save the life of Captain John Smith, and that the story of George and the cherry tree has no basis in fact? Why be too matter-of-fact? I do not care to examine *any* fish story too closely.

THE BOOK OF THE PIKE

While digging amid the English legends regarding this storied fish, it may not prove uninteresting to note some of the supposed medicinal properties of the pike. One of the most effective remedies for "pleurisy" was derived from the powdered jawbones, while the heart yielded up a sovereign remedy for paroxysms. Fair anglers should remember that pulverized pike's eyes is the last word in cosmetics. "The liver of a pike—" but why continue? Enough has already been said to prove that the pike was, if not is, a veritable swimming country doctor.

When we turn our attention from the Old World pike to the fish of America, we are at once confronted with a dearth of legend and story; that is, outside of the Indian tribes, who knew the fish and accredited it with much lore and occult wisdom. The New World angler can but lament the fact that he does not possess tomes and tomes, volumes and volumes of ichthyic literature regarding his game fish. But our fishing is not ancient enough, and we have been too busy and too matter-of-fact to manufacture legends. Legends are the products of leisure and credulity, neither of which is a characteristic of America. We do not believe, for instance, that a pike may be the offspring of a pickerel weed, but we do hear of "sore-teeth days," when muskellunge are supposed to shed their teeth, evidence or proof of which I have been unable to discover, though I have searched the scientific records diligently. Nevertheless, the superstition, if it be that, lingers in many localities. Personally, I have yet to take my first 'lunge with "sore teeth," or to find evidence of dental trouble, perhaps because my fishing has not been done in August. Even though science

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has nothing to say upon the question, anglers are convinced that there is a basis of fact for the belief.

Says Dixie Carroll, the well-known author, in "Lake and Stream Game Fishing": "About the middle of August the musky loses his teeth and his mouth is in such shape that it takes something mighty aggravating to arouse enough anger to make him forget his sore molars and strike." Then, after taking a gentle slam at those who do not agree with him, Dixie continues: "September tenth of last season I examined three musky caught on that day, and in the mouth of each was a new set of sharp-edged teeth, firmly set, while, hanging loosely in the back, were still the remains of the old teeth, which had not entirely parted company with their owners." In the face of such testimony there is nothing to say, though I beg the reader to remember that in lower forms of life rudimentary teeth are common. In the rattlesnake, for instance, the zoölogist finds, lying back of the fang in use, a second as perfect, and back of the second a third not quite perfect, and back of that another less perfect, and so on. In case a rattler loses his fang through accident, a second is ready to take its place. The whole matter of "sore-teeth days" will not be settled until ichthyologists leave the laboratories and take to the woods and waters for study. The United States Fish Commission knows nothing about the "sore-teeth" period. Here a man is permitted to believe as he chooses, only this I am sure of: August is a poor month for muskellunge fishing.

Scientifically speaking, the oldest of our American pikes, the eastern and western pickerel, both described by Le Sueur in 1818, is one hundred years; a very brief

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period indeed, when contrasted with the recorded history of the European pike reaching well beyond the thirteenth century. There is an earlier mention of the pike, though Le Sueur records it in the same year with the pickerels, and we will have to let his date stand. The muskellunge, the Great Lakes fish, is mentioned by Mitchell in 1824; the Ohio fish by Rafinesque in 1818; the Wisconsin fish, though often mentioned in sporting journals, was not, to the best of my knowledge, described by a scientist until Jordan put his capable hand to the task in 1888. Naturally, there is considerable confusion regarding the matter of the muskellunge, the differences regarding the matter of the muskellunge, the differences between the various fish being so slight, forms seeming almost to intergrade, that it is wise to postpone the discussion to a later chapter, when we can take up the whole question carefully.

As will be seen from the foregoing paragraph, if we do not possess ancient ichthyic lore relative to the pike family, we have confusion worse confounded in regard to descriptions of the various fish. As I have searched the early manuscripts and scientific journals, I have been more than once cast all adrift by contradictory statements and overlapping descriptions. We need some wise, scientific angler to straighten out this whole matter of pike history and description, and also to collect the Indian legends regarding the storied northern fish.

I have already mentioned Henshall's book, "Bass, Pike, Perch, and Other Game Fishes of America," as readable a work and as authentic as any I know. However, it is to magazines of the outdoor class that we must go for angling information, though unfortu-

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nately the great majority of those who write for the press do not possess even a smattering of scientific training. Therefore, while their angling lore is good, their scientific (?) dissertations are emphatically not worth while. To illustrate: A writer in one of the oldest and best of outdoor magazines takes the authors of "American Food and Game Fishes" to task for saying that the muskellunge is native to all the Great Lakes, and asserts that to his certain knowledge no muskellunge were ever taken from those waters. The fact of the matter is, if the author had been better acquainted with his subject, he would have known that the Great Lakes muskellunge and the fish of Northern Wisconsin—which, to his provincial mind, is the only true 'lunge—are not the same fish, though both are true muskellunge. The book mentioned a few moments ago, "American Food and Game Fishes," is a safe guide, criticisms to the contrary notwithstanding.

The reason the American pike—and now I speak of the whole family—is not more highly appreciated is because we have so many more worthy fish in all our lakes and streams, the doughty black bass, for instance. Just the same, there is fine sport in angling for even the despised pickerel, a proposition which I boldly affirm and am going to undertake to prove in its proper place. After all, the quality of the sport depends almost as much upon the angler and upon his tools as upon the fish for which he angles. The right sort of a man, properly equipped, will get as much sport out of angling for sunfish as others will fishing for muskellunge with a hand-line. A "contemptible"—the word is not mine—river pickerel taken on a fly with a

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three-ounce rod will put up a battle that will surprise one who has never essayed the game. A chapter on fly-fishing for pickerel will find place in this book later on.

I desire my reader to disabuse himself as far as possible of all preconceived notions, ideas, and prejudices and approach this whole subject with a mind open to conviction. If I do not convince him that I am right in my conclusions, likes, and dislikes, I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have supplied him with some not easily secured information. Ever since a boy I have been a student of fishes, in later years something of a biologist as well as angler, almost as much interested in how the animal is built as in its capture. Unless you have a perichant for scalpel and dissecting knife, know that you can never be certain of the identity of any given fish. The ichthyologist must ever agree with the poet—"Things are not what they seem." As "beauty is only skin-deep," so the markings of a fish are only on the surface, and specific rank depends upon anatomical differences and not mere coloration.

Before I close this chapter I wish to say a word or two for the articles appearing in the various outdoor magazines upon fishing for members of the pike family. Probably the very best and latest information is to be found in the outdoor periodicals. I planned to give a list of articles that had been a help and inspiration to me, but within a year such a list would be antiquated. But read outdoor magazines, bind them, or at least make scrapbooks, and in due time you will possess a veritable encyclopædia of fishing.

CHAPTER III

Description of the American Pikes

"One of the earliest writers by whom the pike is distinctly chronicled is Ausonius, living about the middle of the fourth century, and who thus asperses its character:

'Lucius obscurus ulva lacunas
Obsidet. Hic, nullos mensarum lectus ad usus,
Fumat fumosis olido nidore popinis.'

The wary Luce, midst wrack and rushes hid,
The scourge and terror of the scaly brood,
Unknown at friendship's hospitable board,
Smokes midst the smoky tavern's coarsest food."
—Pennell's "*Book of the Pike*."

MY READERS have already discovered that America is rich in pikes. The Old World can boast of but one species, *Esox lucius*, the fish which, with us, should be known as Great Lakes pike or great pike, to differentiate it from the common pickerel, though unfortunately that latter name is often bestowed upon the Great Lakes fish and even the muskellunge itself. Hereafter I shall denote the Great Lakes pike—not the muskellunge, you understand—as GREAT PIKE, and use the name throughout this work.

The great pike is fairly common in all suitable waters of North America, Europe, and Asia, the one cosmopolitan of the family. In North America we have, according to Jordan and Evermann, six additional species, to wit, the banded pickerel, little pickerel, eastern pickerel, muskellunge, Chautauqua muskellunge, and great northern pike or plain 'lunge,

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which with propriety might be called the North Wisconsin-Minnesota muskellunge, for the name "pike" here is confusing, and the fish is found only in the two states named. The great northern pike is a muskellunge—get that fact clearly in mind; while the great pike, sometimes growing to almost fabulous size, is but a pike. As there is considerable confusion in the minds of anglers regarding the several species of pike, it seems wise to devote some time and space to the discussion of the subject.

Perhaps for convenience it might be a good plan to tabulate the family, giving common names, scientific names, and range, following with a tabloid description of each species:

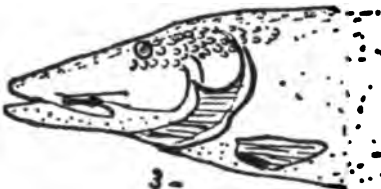
COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	RANGE
Little pickerel.	<i>Esox vermiculatus.</i>	Upper Mississippi Valley and streams emptying into Lakes Erie and Michigan.
Banded pickerel. . . .	<i>Esox Americanus.</i>	East of the Allegheny Mountains, from Massachusetts to Florida.
Eastern pickerel. . . .	<i>Esox reticulatus...</i>	Common everywhere east and south of the Alleghenies, from Maine to Arkansas; common in the Ozarks.
Green pike.		
Common pike.	<i>Esox lucius.</i>	From New York and Ohio northward. Common in Canada. Not found on the Pacific Coast outside of Alaska. The one member of the family found in four continents.
Great Lakes pike...		
Pickerel.		
Jack.		
Great pike (name used in this work).		

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COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	RANGE
Muskellunge..... Lunge.....	<i>Esox masquinongy</i> <i>masquinongy</i> ...	Native of all the Great Lakes, upper St. Lawrence River, and tributary streams; also certain northern lakes.
Ohio muskellunge.. Chautauqua mus- kellunge.....	<i>Esox masquinongy</i> <i>Ohienis</i>	Chautauqua Lake chiefly, but has been reported from certain portions of the Ohio Valley.
Great northern pike. Plain muskellunge.. Plain lunge.....	<i>Esox masquinongy</i> <i>immaculatus</i> -	Only found in Eagle Lake, Wis., and other small lakes in the northern part of that state and also in Northern Minnesota.

The first three fish mentioned deserve the name "pickerel," a cognomen which, by the way, should never be applied to any other pike. Bear in mind that the pickerel is not a small great pike. It will remain a pickerel all the days of its aqueous existence. The fisherman can easily tell whether or not a given specimen is a pickerel or an immature great pike. If both cheeks and gill-covers are covered with scales, it is the former. Hold that one fact in mind and you will never be confused. A great pike has cheeks covered with scales, while the lower half of gill-covers are bare. Always a pickerel has both "squamated," that is, scaled all over.

To describe the three pickerels is hardly necessary, the Mississippi Valley fish not being found in the eastern portion of the country, while the two eastern pickerels are not found in the West. The western pickerel is almost a duplicate of the banded pickerel—



HOW TO IDENTIFY A PIKE

1. PICKEREL—Note both the cheek and gill-cover are fully scaled.
2. GREAT PIKE—All of cheek and half of gill-cover scaled.
3. MUSKELLUNGE—Upper halves of both cheek and gill-cover scaled; naked below.

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indeed may be said to be the western representative of that fish—and is found in all weedy and sluggish streams throughout its range. It is a small fish, a "boy's fish," seldom attaining greater length than a foot and a weight of a pound or so. Though many anglers affect to despise both these fish, I can enjoy a day with the little fellows if properly equipped, as will hereinafter appear.

The eastern pickerel or green pike is something of a fish, under favorable conditions reaching a length of two feet or so and attaining a weight of several pounds. This fish is built more on the lines of a great pike, though the coloration is markedly different. The belly is always white, while the sides are an olive-brown or greenish, with a sort of goldenrod luster. The lower fins are often pink, sometimes almost red. The sides are covered with dark lines and streaks, oblique and horizontal, forming a sort of rough network, hence the name sometimes bestowed upon it, "chain pickerel." Of course, *reticulatus* is never found in the Middle West, so there is little danger of confusing it with *vermiculatus*, if that were possible. Later on when we come to talk of fishing for pickerel, we will class these three fish as one, for the methods used in angling for one may well be employed for all.

Undoubtedly more than one-half of the so-called pickerel taken in the Middle West are great pike, the cosmopolite of the family. If, as the fish savants assert, *vermiculatus* seldom attains a weight much in excess of a pound or two, then the great majority of the "pickerel" caught in the Mississippi Valley are something else; for in my experience the average fish is somewhat heavier. If the angler will

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bear in mind the one point mentioned regarding all pickerel—the squamation of cheeks and gill-covers—and will take pains to examine his captures, he may be certain of their identity. Any pike with cheeks covered with scales, while the gill-covers are decorated on the upper portions only, is a great pike—the great pike.

We have to do with a real fish now, a pike worth while. Personally, I had just as soon fish for great pike as muskellunge, for the former will attain a weight of forty pounds or so, a sixteen- or twenty-pound fish being not at all uncommon. Pound for pound, I cannot see much difference in the game qualities of the great pike and the muskellunge, though I cannot imagine what anglers will do to me for confessing such heresy. To my notion, in cold water a great pike is every whit as gamy as a muskellunge.

As this fish coexists with the Great Lakes muskellunge, the angler should be able to tell the two apart, which is an easy matter if he has impressed upon himself the cheek and gill-cover scaling of the great pike. Cheeks fully scaled and only upper halves of gill-covers. The muskellunge, on the other hand, can show scales only upon the *upper halves of both*. If the angler discovers that a capture of his is without scales upon the lower halves of cheeks and gill-covers, he may be assured that he has taken a muskellunge, no matter what its shape or color or markings. However, in body-form and color the great pike does not ordinarily resemble the muskellunge, being more "pot-bellied" and of a darker hue.

The coloration and markings of the great pike are more constant—at least, so it is said—than that of any other member of the family. The ground color is

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a dirty greenish-gray, darker on the back, and paling to a clear white on the belly. The sides, from head to tail, are decorated with many irregular, oblong, yellowish-white spots, each usually smaller than the eye, and of a lighter shade than the ground color. Ofttimes it seems as though the spots or blotches were arranged in rows running from head to tail, though this is not a constant feature, or rather is a case where the eye of the observer is deceived. Lay a rule along the side of a fresh-caught fish and discover for yourself. The caudal, dorsal, and anal fins are also spotted or splashed with dark spots, darker than the ground color. The head is large for the size of the body, sometimes being one-fourth as long, while the jaws open wide and are armed with a truly formidable array of strong teeth. Ill betides the angler who is unfortunate enough to get his hand caught between those cruel jaws.

When we turn to the muskellunge of the Great Lakes, a muskie which some anglers say does not exist, we are confronted with a fish very similar in appearance to the great pike just described. We have the same general body-form, though often more "pot-bellied," as was pointed out. Of course, here only the upper half of the cheeks and gill-covers can show scales, because it is a muskellunge. While in the great pike the markings were of a lighter shade than the ground color, in the muskellunge the markings are darker, and in old fish may show a tendency to coalesce. The general effect is that of a dark gray body, with blackish oval spots superimposed. The Chautauqua and Ohio fish is of a greenish-brassy shade, the darker spots coalescing and forming broad

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vertical bars of a darker green which do not break up distinctly into spots. The fin-spots are greenish rather than black. The North Wisconsin fish, *Esox immaculatus*, differs from the first muskellunge mentioned, in having the body entirely unspotted, sometimes with indistinct darker cross-shades.

It is this fish of the smaller Wisconsin and Minnesota lakes which is responsible to a great extent for the confusion in some anglers' minds. So different is it in appearance from the others that they are inclined to argue that the other muskellunge do not belong to the *Esox nobilior*, as some ichthyologists prefer to denominate the muskellunge. Jordan and Evermann, whose classification I follow, and who are responsible for the three species, confess that the Wisconsin-Minnesota form has not been studied critically in relation to the other two. Personally, I have not had sufficient opportunity to study the Chautauqua fish to render an opinion, though by the mere fact that the Wisconsin-Minnesota angler is so determined that his is the only true muskellunge, I am quite convinced the markings of his particular fish must be very uniform and well defined. So far as my own observation has gone, the Wisconsin-Minnesota fish does differ in appearance, though not in squamation, branchiostegals, dentition, or body-form from the Great Lakes denizen. As all anglers know, the classification of fish depends not upon appearance or coloration, which are largely the result of food and environment, but upon anatomical or structural differences.

All ichthyologists are not agreed that there are three varieties of muskellunge, maintaining that the asserted differences are not constant. Dr. James A.

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Henshall, the well-known savant, in "Bass, Pike, Perch, and Other Game Fishes of America," speaking of this matter says (I quote by permission):

"I have examined and compared specimens from the St. Lawrence and Indian Rivers, New York, Lake Erie, the Wisconsin Lakes, Lake Pepin, Chautauqua and Conneaut Lakes, Scioto and Mahoning Rivers in Ohio, and have seen preserved heads of large ones from Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and found that they all agree so well in the number of branchiostegals, squamation of the cheeks and opercles, in dentition, fins, and measurements, that they must all be considered one and the same species. At the Chicago Columbian Exposition there were some twenty very large specimens of mounted skins from Canadian waters in the exhibition of the Ottawa Museum which showed well the variations in markings. Some still showed dark spots on a gray ground; others were more or less distinctly barred with broad or narrow bands; others showed bars and diffused spots; and still others were of a uniform slate or grayish coloration, without markings of any kind. In the museum of the Cuvier Club, in Cincinnati, there are quite a number of mounted skins of muskellunge from the Wisconsin lakes, mostly large ones. They also show all the various markings, as well as those of a uniform coloration."

When scientists disagree, what wonder that mere anglers quarrel? Perhaps it will be some time before the whole matter is threshed out and the status of the muskellunge fixed. Till then let each angler keep his temper and add his bit to the information on the subject. My guess is that never will we regard all

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muskellunge as belonging to one species, for the maker of scientific names is abroad in the land, eager to have his cognomen attached to some one of God's creations. Suffer this word of exhortation, brothers of the angle, remembering what has been said upon the marks of the muskellunge: Do not say that the other fellow's fish is not a true muskie simply because its coloration is not like yours or was not caught from your water-shed.

To show how restricted some would make the range of the "true muskellunge," casting out all but one particular form as "mere pickerel," let me quote from a magazine article supposed to be authoritative:

"Its distribution is not extensive; in fact, it seems to be limited to the lakes and rivers of the Upper Mississippi system and to portions of Canadian St. Lawrence waters. It is a strange circumstance that in the United States the muskellunge is never found in the St. Lawrence waters. In Wisconsin, where the watershed is narrow, and the lakes flowing into the rivers which are tributary to the St. Lawrence are but a quarter of a mile distant in many cases from the lakes emptying into the rivers of the Mississippi system, the muskellunge will be numerous in the latter waters, but entirely absent from the former."

So this author, who evidently knows the fish of his district and how to angle for it, would reject as spurious the so-called Chautauqua muskellunge, and with it, of course, all the work accomplished at the Chautauqua Hatchery by Dr. Bean and his associates, who have successfully propagated what they supposed were muskellunge! The preacher may have been right, and too much knowledge is a weariness to the flesh, but a judicious amount will prevent some egregious errors.

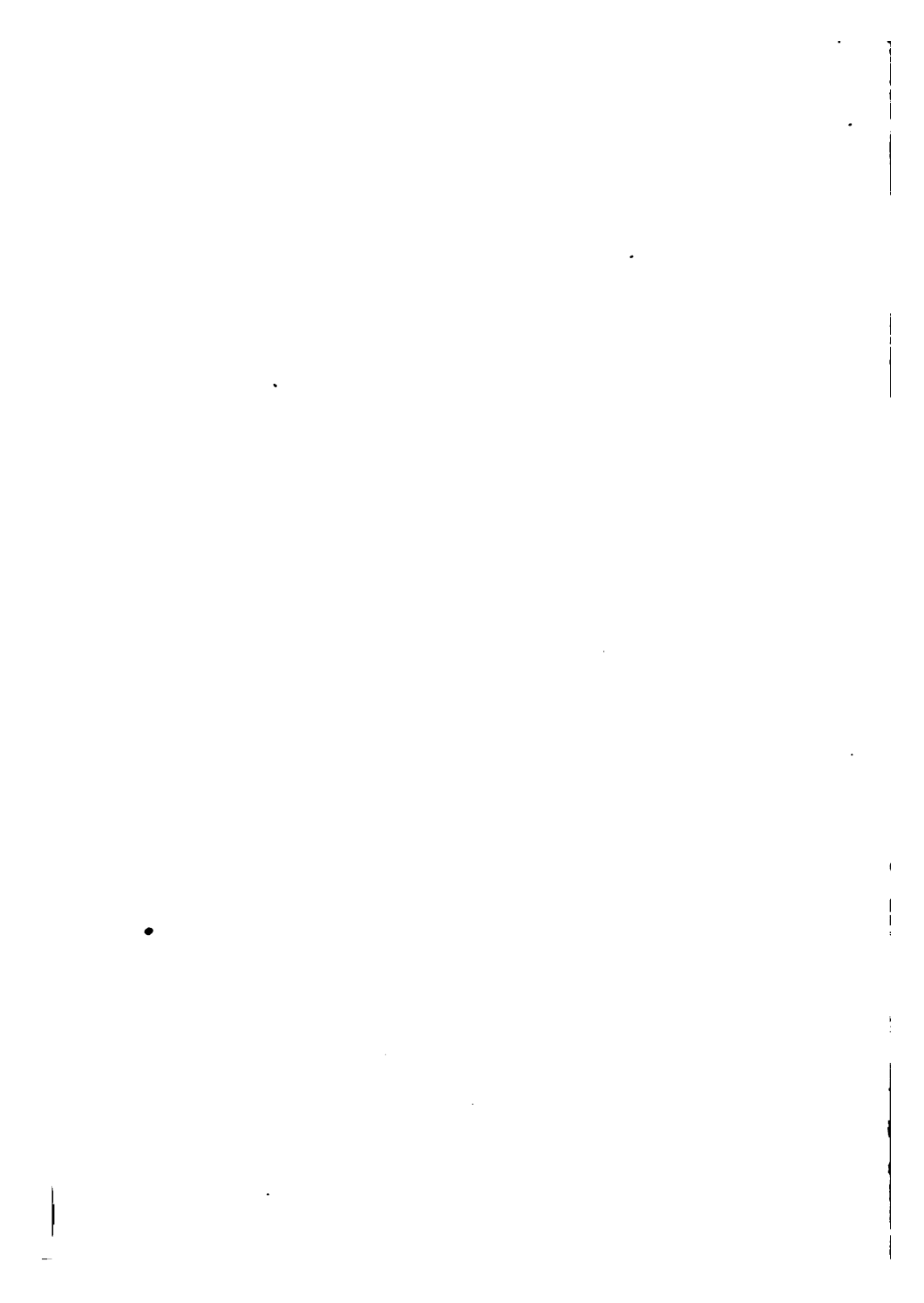


A STUDY OF HEADS

Head of a Large Chautauqua Muskellunge. (Note the plain scaling on cheek and gill-cover.)

Head of Same Fish. Front View. (Note the well-developed teeth.)

Courtesy N. Y. Fish Commission.



DESCRIPTION OF THE AMERICAN PIKES

I hold the resort men responsible for helping to confound the muskellunge question, for they have advertised muskellunge fishing, knowing that men think it an honor to take that fish, when what they had to offer was great pike fishing. Now the great pike is under no necessity of swimming under borrowed fins. He is well able to care for himself as a plain, pugnacious great pike. As I have said before, and will enlarge upon later, I had just as soon go up against an eight-pound great pike as a muskie of the same weight. Fin for fin and scale for scale, I regard the former as doughty an antagonist as the latter. Quite recently there was shipped me from a Wisconsin resort the head of a "muskellunge" which was said to have weighed thirty-two pounds, and gave his lucky captor a busy twenty minutes. Now that head—cheeks fully scaled, gill-covers half scaled—disclosed a great pike. Could that fish have rendered greater sport had he worn cheeks and gill-covers half scaled? In the name of Father Izaak, let us be fair to the great pike.

As to the edibility of the members of this family, there is no great unanimity of opinion. Most anglers give the muskellunge high rank, the great pike low rank—if under two pounds, and they call him "pickerel" or "watersnake," no rank at all; while the little pickerel, the creek fish, should hardly be mentioned in good ichthyic society. As to just why a muskellunge should be regarded as "good eating," and a great pike of the same size "poor eating," is beyond my comprehension. The habits and food of the two fish are practically the same—almost anything from a tin can to a member of its own family. I cannot discover much difference between the flesh of the two fish. All depends upon

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the water inhabited. I have found a five-pound great pike from the waters of Lake Superior good eating, a twenty-one pounder very tasty, though slightly dry, and I have enjoyed fried river pickerel when they were taken from a one-time trout stream. I think, to borrow one of Walton's expressions regarding another matter, he who turns down the great pike as an article of food is "a little too superstitious." Unquestionably no member of the pike family can be compared either to the yellow perch, wall-eye—"pike-perch" or black bass as a pan fish. However, later we may revert to this question again, giving some cooking directions, as I did in "Trout Lore," for the aristocrats of cold water; for the pikes, as quaint Izaak observes, properly cooked, are "choicely good."

CHAPTER IV

The Little Pickerels

"The apostles, though they were fishers, too, were of the solemn race of sea-fishers, and never trolled for pickerel on inland waters."—*Henry David Thoreau.*

THE hermit of Walden was neither an angler nor a fisherman, yet he sensed the attractivity of pickerel fishing. Angling for pickerel is not the serious business that fishing for Atlantic salmon is. It is not the goal, but the journey thereto, that counts. Never for a moment does the possible outcome of the battle worry the pickerel angler. What if the fish escape; are there not others as small? What if no fish rise; are not the trees, flowers, and birds ever present? Says the author just quoted (Thoreau): "I have frequently seen a poet withdraw, having enjoyed the most valuable part of a farm, while the crusty farmer supposed that he had got a few wild apples only." I leave the reader to construct a paraphrase for himself. Pickerel fishing is for the poet-angler. Unless you can creel something beside a few bony fish when you angle for pickerel, you had best omit this chapter.

In the preceding chapter I described the three pickerels of the United States—the eastern pickerel (*Esox reticulatus*) and the banded pickerel (*Esox Americanus*) being found east and south, while the little pickerel or grass pike (*Esox vermiculatus*) is found north and west. Bear in mind, any pickerel may be

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known by the fact that *both cheeks and gill-covers are fully covered with scales*, and that is all you need to remember for identification. If other arrangement, you may have a young great pike or even muskellunge. Pay no attention to the matter of color and spotting. As the habits of the three pickerels are practically identical and the method of angling for one is the method to be employed for all, henceforth in this chapter I will write of pickerel as though there were but one species.

The pickerel is essentially a river fish, though he may be taken from shallow, weed-infested ponds. He is not a lover of overly deep water or cold streams. Like the great pike, spawning early in spring, as soon as the ice goes out you will find him making his way upstream or seeking out the shallows close inshore for spawning purposes. As the pickerel and great pike spawn at the same time, there is a possibility of a cross or hybrid (see appendix). Spawning accomplished, the fish takes up the even tenor of its way, lying in wait amid weeds and rushes or habituating itself in a reedy or rooty pool, from which it can dash in pursuit of some luckless minnow, mouse, or frog. Indeed, like all members of the *Esox* family, anything that can satisfy hunger is grist for its mill. None of the pickerels are as solitary in their habits as are the great pike and muskellunge. Once locate a "pickerel hole," and it is almost a safe bet that the understanding angler can take all of the little fish he desires. Yet one must proceed with considerable circumspection, for the fish is more wary than the uninitiated imagine.

The western fish, small in size, is not so much sought after by anglers, though the eastern pickerel, ranging

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anywhere from one to eight pounds, is highly thought of by some fishermen, not to mention the ubiquitous small boy. However, I dare defend even the little pickerel as a "game fish;" that is, when hooked on proper tackle. When one reads of fishing for pickerel through the ice, a fascinating sport to be described later on in this work, it is usually the eastern pickerel (*Esox reticulatus*) and the great pike (*Esox lucius*) the writers have in mind. One should not troll for pickerel: the fish run too small, and there is a better method, namely, casting.

CASTING FOR PICKEREL

This is essentially shore casting, for few ideal pickerel streams are navigable for even canoes, so choked are they with fallen trees and drift; but where one can get along with a light craft, casting from a boat may be indulged in. Nevertheless, the problems confronting the shore-caster are so many and so difficult of solution that I give that method first place. The average pickerel river presents tangled banks—woodbine, star cucumber, and clematis festooning sumac and prickly ash with an almost impenetrable tangle of cobwebby streamers and rope-like vines. To secure and maintain a casting position is sometimes a problem. More than once I have made my perilous way out upon a protruding log, only to discover that I had neglected to figure out some way of netting a hooked fish, my light tackle being inadequate to lift the capture by main strength and awkwardness. Yes, more than once I have found myself in the position of the man who needed someone to help him let go the bear. As between the value of a twenty-dollar one-piece casting

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rod and a two-cent fish there is not much room for argument. Standing upon a projecting log or trunk of a dead tree some ten feet above the surface of the water, I have invoked high heaven to rid me of the very thing I had journeyed far to capture.

As intimated in the foregoing chapter, tackle for such fishing (casting) should be of the most delicate. The lightest one-piece tournament split bamboo, if you are adequate to that sort of tool; if not, then a five-foot six-inch steel. The latter is not likely to break, even should you fall from some precarious position into a "bramble bush and scratch out both your eyes." The former may be broken on a ten-inch pickerel in an unwary moment should you lose your head. About the only reel at all adapted to such a stream as I have in mind at the moment is one of the self-spooling variety; the angler will have other employment for his left hand than spooling a line. Where there are open fishing, clear banks, and wide pools, there is nothing equal to that aluminum tournament reel with large spool. Use the lightest quadruple multiplier possible to procure. Do not imagine because your game is "nothing but a river snake" that the tackle is unimportant. *The smaller and less resourceful the fish, the more important the question of tackle.* Always remember when angling for small fish it is not strength of tackle, but lightness, that makes for sport. The lure should be a small surface or surface-underwater, brightly colored, reds, yellows, greens and whites, singly or in combination. Let the line be a small-caliber soft braided silk, No. H or finer; a tournament "thread" will provide thrills.

In casting from the shore, the angler must fish the

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far side of the stream. A little experience will soon instruct the observing where to shoot the lure. Overhanging banks, grassy shores, snags, and piles of drift may all shelter fish, though pickerel are not so much given to lairs as are bass, preferring the shady side of a shallow pool. I have already pointed out that the fish is inclined to gregariousness, one strike being but the precursor of others, if the angler handle his lures with skill and wisdom. Do not over-cast. If the fish follows the lure in, wait a bit before casting a second time, or cast in some other direction. Do not reel in too swiftly; for, while the pickerel can swim at a rapid rate, he is quite apt to regard a swiftly moving lure with suspicion. I am inclined to believe that the lure should strike the water without much commotion; for, unlike the bass again, this fish seldom strikes the lure at the instant of its impact upon the water. Let the ripples chase themselves shoreward before you begin to reel. There is something about the splash of the lure which seems to awaken the suspicions of the fish, and they will often follow the lure some distance, just a few inches behind the rear hook, without striking; indeed, it is not uncommon for them to follow right up to the angler's feet without manifesting any tendency to strike. Reeling by "fits and starts" will sometimes induce a reluctant pickerel to strike if at all in the mood.

We all remember Walton's apothegm regarding "no bad horse of a good color," as applied to weather. And, with all due respect and consideration for that wise saying, let me say that the weather and time of day have considerable influence with pickerel and his larger relatives. In warm weather the early morning is far

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and away the best time for casting, evening taking second place, though a close, mizzling day, with a menace of thunder in the air, is ideal. Then, if ever, pickerel will rise. Upon a cold, blustering day one will be compelled to resort to live bait, more regarding which when we take up the study of the great pike.

Speaking of the weather reminds me of a rather unique experience a few summers ago, the narrating of which has been reserved through the passing seasons for this work. I, in company with a lifelong friend, was fishing a little unimportant river which finds its tortuous way into Green Bay, an arm of Lake Michigan. Time was when the stream contained that aristocrat amid fresh-water fishes, the speckled trout; but the encroachment of farmers had quenched feeder springs, and the temperature of the water had risen above the durance of the aristocrat, his place in time being taken by the humble chub and much-maligned *Esox vermiculatus*. The stream had disappeared from the map so far as outside anglers were concerned, the small boy and cane pole alone remaining to mark its ichthyic course. For an angler with rod and reel to appear upon its banks was to invite the good-natured contempt of the farmers through whose land it made its way. Nevertheless, my companion and I in due time parked our cars close to the water's edge, where, in days long gone, Indians had erected their conical wigwams.

My first cast out upon the placid surface of the little pool before us resulted in a "short rise." Slowly reeling in, I saw the little pickerel following the lure at a safe distance. Probably it was the first "wobbler" he had ever seen. Waiting a few moments for the water to

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"rest," I cast again and reeled in slowly. He struck, and the lithe rod, built especially for such baby casting, set the hook firmly without any effort on my part. The battle was on. Yes, it was a *battle*. Snags above and below offered the fish safe refuges, provided he could reach them; then, too, the rod weighed a scant three ounces. The initial cast was something like 100 feet. The odds were all in the fish's favor. Not caring if I lost him, I could bend all my energies to playing in the most approved manner. Right there lies the great attractivity of such angling—the playing. The fish itself is of no importance. In due time I lifted the little fellow from the water and, with a sharp knife-blade thrust through the spine just back of his head, ended his career. Back of me were the women with waiting fry-pans.

We separated. I fished up- and my friend down-stream. The river was alive with pickerel and I thoroughly enjoyed the sport. It was the game of childhood reversed. Instead of playing at being a man, I was playing at being a boy. The day grew unaccountably hot, with a continuous mutter of thunder in the west and north. The air was perfectly still; not a ripple disturbed the surface of the little pools, while even the ever-trembling leaves of the asp forgot to shiver. Awesome thunderheads, shading from pure white above to blackest nimbus below, appeared above the treetops. I spent little time studying the heavens. The pickerel were feeding, and that was enough for me. The sky became dark and thunder boomed and crashed around me. I was a fool, I am willing to admit now, but I fished on.

Perhaps I was half a mile above the party, when I

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was startled by what I took to be a stone striking the water just beyond the tip of my rod, followed immediately by a second and third. Thinking that my chum was playing tricks, I turned to the brush back of me and admonished him to "cut it out." Still stones and more stones fell. A severe thump on top of my head brought me to a realization of the situation. Thor was not only letting fly his thunderbolts, he was also pelting me with hailstones as large as hickory nuts. It was a terrific storm while it lasted, and effectually ended our pickerel fishing for the day. It was a wet and bedraggled party, nursing innumerable "sore spots," which made its way back to town.

FLY-FISHING FOR PICKEREL

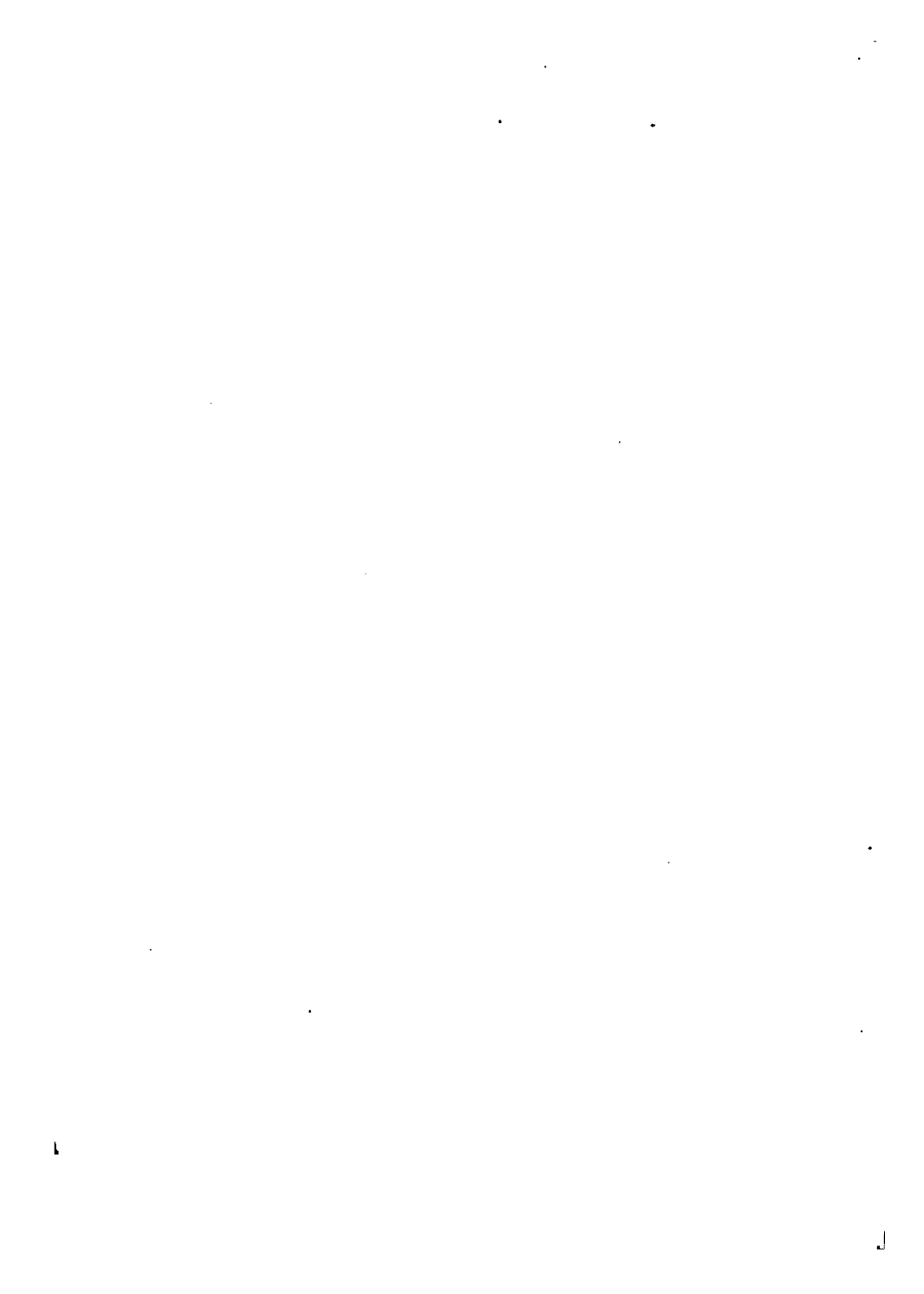
The man who has not learned to angle for inconsequential fish with fly-rod and click-reel has neglected a very pleasurable sport indeed. There is no game or near-game fish that will not rise to a properly offered fly. I speak after years of experimentation. Elsewhere I have told of the attractivity of fly-fishing for sunfish, and later on in this volume I shall tell of fly-fishing for great pike, a sport for kings, whether from boat, bank, or knee-deep in the sedge. Fishing for river pickerel, as the little pike is often called, is truly enjoyable if the angler possesses requisite tackle, does not demand too much strength from the fish, or expect too much from the flesh when it is in the pan.

A three-and-one-half- or four-ounce rod is none too light for the little pickerel, and even should one of the the larger great pike happen to take the fuzzy-wuzzy lure, if the angler be expert enough, he can net it without trouble. I would advise a single-action reel, which



SHORE CASTING FOR RIVER PICKEREL

1. The Rise.
2. All In.



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I would not do if angling for great pike, for reasons which will appear later. The lightest reel will prove none too light if it balance the rod. For ease in casting, the medium-sized regular enameled silk line is recommended. I would have the line of a shade to harmonize with the color of the water to be cast over. As to flies, select flamboyant patterns like "Silver Doctor," "Scarlet Ibis," "Jungle Cock," "Royal Coachman," etc., tied to regular bass hooks. The flies cannot well be too large. If you have any skill in fly-tying, fashion something for yourself of brilliant colors with streaming tail. I once made some mistake in feather dyeing, and instead of securing the desired color, produced a shade of purple of unimaginable brilliance, unlike any color ever seen tinting wing of gauzy ephemera of lake or stream. Yet those feathers made wonderfully alluring flies. A peacock-herl body, purple hackle, streaming purple and crimson tail feathers formed a fly pickerel and great pike seemed unable to resist. The point to remember in fly-fishing for members of the pike family is that the unusual is apt to prove successful. I doubt very much if these fish strike at the moving object because it looks like some accustomed food, but because it moves, and is therefore something that will satisfy an insatiable appetite. The pickerel is not a particular feeder.

As to the method of handling flies, little need be said. I take it for granted that the reader knows something of the methods of casting flies and lures. If you have ever taken black bass on artificial flies, you will experience no difficulty in hooking pickerel. He takes the fly with a rush usually, and, like the man who marries in haste, repents when he has ample time for

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repenting. One should cast exactly as in bass fly-fishing, allowing the flies to settle well in the water before reeling in, and reel slowly with a right and left jerking motion unless the current prevents. Which leads me to say that if the river possesses much current, the fish will be found in pools above jams, in eddies and elbows of the stream. Cast upstream and reel with the current. Do not hurry. The fish has all the time there is and so have you, or you would not be fishing.

You will often see, as in bait casting, the little fellow following the fly in, a trick he may repeat again and again. Do not worry or become overly anxious for him to strike; he is only investigating. More than once I have compelled the fish to "take" by simply drawing the fly through the water quite rapidly and then stopping suddenly, the result being that the pickerel would take the fly instantly, overrun it, as it were, to all appearances without intending to do so.

Not always, however, is a pickerel hooked when the fly is mouthed. The fish has an armor-plated mouth, not easily penetrated by the hook. The angler must "set" the hook with an exaggerated "wrist motion." Swing the rod sharply to the right or left, as the case may demand, against the current if possible. Always keep control of the fly. A slack line is suicidal so far as "net results" are concerned. The only place for haste in pickerel fly-fishing is when the fish has overrun the hook; then strike instantly, upon the fraction of a second, or the lure will be rejected. Verily there is more to the game than first appears, and, wanting better sport, it is rare fun.

I well remember a shallow pond in North Minne-

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sota, called by courtesy only a lake, upon which I have had unlimited sport with pickerel. The shores, sedge-grown, were wadeable, which added to the fun. There is never quite the sport in casting from a boat or river bank, that there is in working along waist-deep in water and playing your fish with rod held high in the air. Even a small pickerel can puzzle an experienced fisherman under such conditions.

Upon the lake of which I write, one "mosquito day" (every Minnesotian knows what I mean) the last of June some twenty years ago, I was working along the edge of sedge and pickerel weed just as the sun poked his red rim above the rolling prairie to the east. Countless numbers of "suggema" buzzed and roared about my head, biting now and then in spite of liberal dressings of "dope." Still the pickerel were rising to feathers, and as I had been denied any sort of angling for nearly two years, the reader will not be surprised at my remaining in the game e'en though, like the immortal Bozzaris, I bled at every pore. Again and again I failed to hook my fish, for it was exceedingly difficult to secure the requisite "purchase," so deep in the water was I. Nevertheless, now and then a little olive-green squirmer found its way into my creel and I was content. The fish averaged small, all under a foot, probably, and as a pickerel is almost one-third head, my store of vulgar meat did not increase rapidly, and I was fishing for breakfast.

At last, with seven or eight fish in my creel, I waded to the shore and climbed the highest bluff where the breeze could catch the mosquitoes, and built a little fire of sagebrush. In due time the bacon was fretting in the pan, and then the pickerel sputtered in turn.

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Pickereel may not be "good eating," "are too full of bones," "are too soft," are too this, that, and the other; but as I look back over the years, the memory of that morning meal above the mosquito-infested sedge stands out as one of the most savory and satisfactory. Whatever pickerel flesh may be like when taken from warm water, from cold lakes and once-were-trout streams it is sweet and savory. (Perhaps not a little depends upon the outdoor appetite, too.)

Strange what tricks memory plays with facts. As I sit here at my desk arranging the matter for "The Book of the Pike," with a "cord" of notebooks and reference works galore on the shelves behind me, one of the most pleasant memories is that of the mosquito-infested lake. The rush of the hooked fish thrills my arm yet, as it did that morning so long ago after months of piscatorial abstemiousness. Even the memory of that cloud of stinging, buzzing mosquitoes is metamorphosed into a sort of glorified halo. Very far away and very unreal seems the impatient anger of the morning, a thing to laugh over. I could not have made a better memory than He who ordained that unpleasant things should sink into abeyance with the passage of time, pleasant happenings alone remaining permanent. And now abide these three—the thrill of battle, the lift of victory, the mellow memory, and the greatest of these is mellow memory.

Remains to mention that a pickerel will take a spoon, for any rapidly moving object has great attraction for him. The average trolling spoon is too large for this fish; the gang has too many hooks. With a treble in his mouth the little fellow loses whatever pluck or courage he may have had, a truth which obtains of

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more worthy fish than the despised pickerel. Too many hooks spoil the sport, even as too many cooks are said to spoil the broth. The best spoon bait is simply a single blade attached to a weighted streaming fly and cast with a regulation bass fly-rod. If you can handle a lure without, omit the weight. If you do not care to manufacture a lure for yourself, then invest in one of the trout spoons so much used in certain sections for that fish, substituting a larger and more showy fly for the one attached. Believe me when I say that there are possibilities in pickerel fly-fishing for the discriminating and appreciative angler, for the one who has learned that success is not a matter of pounds and weighty possibilities.

Granted, as has been intimated all along, pickerel fishing, however practiced, is "boy's fishing," nevertheless it is truly enjoyable, an agreeable rest from the more strenuous methods of angling. Perhaps, as a friend of mine asserts, pickerel fishing is to 'lunge fishing what marbles is to baseball, but even so, there is a legitimate place for marbles. If the reader, like the writer, has followed the trail of muskellunge and great pike week in and week out, season in and season out, he, like him, will be glad to turn to the little, unimportant pickerel for rest and recreation.

So we have arrived at the place where we must "put away childish things." Our next chapter will begin the discussion of great pike fishing, which may be a man's sport.

CHAPTER V

Casting for Great Pike with Artificial Lures

"Whence and what are you, monster grim and great?
Sometimes we think you are a 'Syndicate,'
For if our quaint cartoonists be but just,
You have some features of the modern 'Trust.'
A wide, ferocious and rapacious jaw;
A vast, insatiate and expansive craw;
And, like the 'Trust,' your chiefest aim and wish
Was to combine in one all smaller fish,
And all the lesser fry succumbed to fate
Whom you determined to consolidate."

—Willcox.

AS HAS already been emphasized, the great pike (*Esox lucius*) is the one cosmopolite of the family. The rodster of Europe and the fisherman of Asia, no less than the angler of North America, may take the "mighty Luce or Pike." Wherever found, he is the same solitary, vindictive individual, a cruel tyrant, and insatiable gourmand. The horrid gleam of his malevolent yellow eye is a true index to his character. One finds it easy to believe that he kills for the pure joy of killing, though I am not sure that he is guilty of the crime. I am aware that great pike are often taken with the tails of recently captured fish protruding from their mouths, but so are wall-eyes and bass taken on live bait when it would seem impossible for them to swallow another morsel. Indeed even the aristocratic brook trout are found feeding upon worms after a heavy rain, even though stomach

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and throat are literally packed with partly digested and undigested "garden hackle." I doubt very much if, pound for pound and inch for inch, the great pike is more of a gourmand than some more highly appreciated game fish. To the charge that he is a born murderer, a sort of ichthyic degenerate, I can only reiterate that I am somewhat skeptical. Always remember that it requires several pounds of other fish to make one pound of pike. Few of us would exchange twenty pounds of brook trout, say, for one pound of great pike; that would not be an even exchange, therefore robbery.

I once knew a private trout pond, devoted to the propagation of rainbow and eastern trout, in which the fish were apparently doing well. Two years after stocking, I myself took two-pound rainbow from its waters. Then it was noticed that the trout seemed less numerous, fewer and fewer were taken by ardent anglers, until at last a rise was unknown. Then the pond was drained and thirteen lusty great pike were found, but no trout. Some boys had liberated a few "pickerel" minnows, not over four inches long, into the feed stream "just to see them swim," and they had swum right down into the trout pond, a location they found very much to their liking.

One summer I captured a number of "pickerel" minnows (they were true great pike, I afterwards discovered) and confined them in a tank for the purpose of study. Though the little fellows were fed regularly, were supplied with all the food they could eat, they just would attack one another. Once a minnow had secured a grip on a fellow minnow, he would hang on with bulldog tenacity, not letting go until he had

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killed his victim. This tenaciousness is a characteristic of the whole pike family. Again and again great pike have been brought to gaff when untouched by the hook, simply because they would not let go the bait. I have fastened a knot of red-and-white cloth to a trolling-line and captured pike without a hook, a not at all difficult feat.

Added to the fish's insatiable appetite, wolfish ferocity, and bulldog tenacity, is a liking for solitude. The larger the fish, the more he is inclined to a hermit life, save at the spawning season. I am tempted to believe that both great pike and muskellunge have "homes" and well-defined hunting grounds, but more of the matter further along. As soon as the ice goes out, great pike feel the urge of procreation, and seek out the shallows and marshes to spawn. During the spring freshets when creeks and rivers are out of their banks, pike may be found well inland. The size of the fish is often a revelation. From a "fished-out" lake will come eight-, ten-, and fifteen-pound "lunkers," not singly or in pairs, but dozens and scores. Where they keep themselves during the open fishing season is a problem for anglers to solve. Around the marge of a certain Wisconsin lake and out on the overflowed marshes at the outlet I have seen some sights to gladden the eyes of the lover of great pike fishing. Yet, when spawning was over, the weather warm, and the season open, one would have to fish hard early and late in order to take a pair of medium-sized fish.

It is while the fish are spawning that the spearers and illegal fishers generally get in their nefarious work. As a boy I have hunted pickerel on the marshes, the result being a wetting and a severe cold, for I was seldom

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quick enough to shoot or spear my prey, though I found fish in plenty. Honestly—and confession is said to be good for the soul—I never succeeded in spearing but one fish, and if the Red Gods will forgive me that crime, I shall go down to my grave content.

Hunting at night with a "jack" (some sort of artificial light raised above the bow of the boat so that the spearsman, standing back of it, can see down into the water) is uniformly successful. The fish has no chance. Fortunately, and rightly, the method is outlawed in most of the states. Some of the catches made during a night's spearing is passing belief. I have known a single individual to return in the morning with a washtub full of lusty great pike, perhaps but a fourth or sixth of the night's catch. Obviously not only will true sportsmen frown upon the practice, but will do all in their power to bring the offenders to justice. Spearing is cruel and wasteful at any season of the year, but doubly short-sighted in the spring, when each female represents thousands of fry. Undoubtedly there is a certain attractiveness, romance, about night spearing—the circumscribed area of bright light with its wall of dense darkness beyond, the slow-moving panorama below with its myriad forms of strange life, the all-encompassing silence, deep and audible—all this and more appeals to that innate love of poesy to which every outdoor man is heir. Nevertheless, the practice is inexcusable, because short-sighted, cruel—many wounded fish escaping to die a lingering death—and contrary to law. It must cease.

In a foregoing paragraph I mentioned the great pike's solitary habits. Probably there are other reasons than evil temper for the fish's dwelling alone. As has

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already been pointed out, it takes more than a little food to supply a great pike with sufficient nutriment, a single mouse, frog, or minnow being but an appetizer. Naturally the hunting ground is divided up between large fish, consciously or unconsciously. Of course, I do not know that a great pike defends his hunting ground against invading fish, but I have witnessed terrific fights between males during the spawning period, and I would not be surprised to discover that the approach of a large fish would be the signal for an attack from the great pike lying in his usual lair; especially so since I demonstrated again and again that a pike strikes at a moving object when hungry, waiting to determine the nature of his prey after capturing it.

As to whether or not a great pike wanders far from its lair, an observer is unable to determine, though the fact that a given fish may usually be expected to strike at a given point, actually strikes again and again and upon succeeding days until captured, is a strong argument in favor of a restricted range. In my experience the older, and consequently the heavier a fish, the more disinclined it is to leave certain well-defined hunting grounds. Therefore the expression commonly used by anglers, "I'll go back there and get that old fellow some day," is something more than an ichthyic crow. I think what we may term "home instinct" is more largely a determining factor in a fish's life than most anglers imagine.

I remember a certain deep hole in the Wolf River, Wisconsin, just below a long, grassy flat, from which during a certain camping trip I was always sure of securing a strike from a goodly great pike. No, I never

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succeeded in hooking the fish, for some reason or other, though I caught several heart-quickenings glimpses of him. I believe that with my increased pike knowledge, I could go back there to-day and succeed in hooking the old fellow. In those days I was altogether too anxious to catch fish, swung my lure too often, and pulled it through the water too rapidly.

The combination mentioned in the first sentence of the foregoing paragraph, "deep water, with marring grass," indicates good great pike fishing if found in pike water. Great pike desire deep water for hot days and perhaps for retirement after a full meal. The marsh grass, reeds, or weeds form a good lurking place and are the home of frogs, minnows, and small fish. In lakes you will often find water lilies growing at the edge of deep water, the marge of which is sure to be pre-empted by great pike and pickerel. From the manner in which the fish attack, I am inclined to believe that they lie with their bodies concealed in the weeds, head pointed outward, so when some luckless minnow or small fish passes they can literally leap upon it. The edges of any aquatic growth is good casting ground along rivers as well as in lakes. The caster must always remember to cast *to* something, not in any direction, for pike do not lie anywhere, though a hook trailing behind a boat may attract fish when least expected, a matter which will be discussed under the heading of "Trolling."

Perhaps I shall be unable to utter a more meaningful bit of advice than the foregoing—"cast to something." Therein lies the secret of success, implying as it does considerable fish knowledge. Early in the day, again late in the afternoon, and when feeding, great pike lie

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in their waiting places. Then cast; at other times you will get exercise, but no fish. It is useless to cast with artificial lures, unless fish are feeding on or near the surface. At other times wise anglers resort to other methods—under-waters, live bait, trolling spoons, etc., methods to be discussed in their proper place. Members of the pike family are not as apt to take up their abode in the branches of a down tree or beneath driftwood as are bass, though I would always fish out such places on the chance of their concealing fish. Allow no chance—possible chance—to pass. It is better to cast many times uselessly than to miss some record-breaking great pike. Take for your consolation that even those who have made a lifelong study of the fish are unable to surely foreknow where a great pike may hide or just what he may do under any given circumstance. It is the element of uncertainty that makes great pike angling or any other fishing, as for that, so attractive.

That casting is far and away the most successful and sportsmanlike method of taking great pike I am firmly convinced. More successful, because the angler is actually casting where the fish lurks, waiting for food; and more sportsmanlike, because the handling of artificial lures is always a finer and nicer method of angling than where bait is employed. "Finer," "nicer," those two words do not adequately convey just what I have in mind, yet they must serve. There is something very attractive about the swinging rod, the forward shoot of the lure, while the reel shouts an accompaniment; the dull "flop-plop" of the striking lure, followed by the occasional noisy commotion of an attacking fish. That great-pike fishing with lures is about the

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last word in casting, I am ready to affirm. The reader should remember that all I have said about the fish's habits, and will say regarding tackle, applies to the muskellunge equally well.

The tackle employed in casting for great pike differs in no essential from that used by the bass caster; so if the reader desires the author's opinion upon the subject—a somewhat exhaustive discussion of the matter—he is again urged to read the chapters in "Casting Tackle and Methods," dealing with rod material, weight, length, etc., types of reels and lures, that he may more fully appreciate what correct tackle means. Yet, "by and large," as the saying has it, tackle for great pike fishing need not differ greatly from that affected by the bass caster.

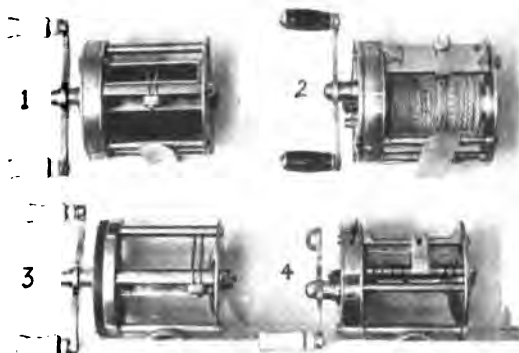
Naturally, a wise angler would not employ one of the ultra light rods sometimes affected by those fishermen who are in the habit of courting thrills. A three-and-one-half-ounce rod is rather light to use in angling where the lucky fisherman may hook a twenty- or twenty-five-pound great pike. (My largest great pike taken while casting, weighed twenty-three pounds two ounces, dead. Not a large fish as the species run.) The mere weight of such a fish might wreck a three-ounce bamboo. Some years ago I wrote the maker of a certain well-known split-bamboo caster, asking if he would recommend his light rod for muskellunge fishing. To which he promptly replied in language something like the following: "Most emphatically, no. The light-waisted rod was never made that would stand up under the strain; but we build a rod for Florida bass fishing which we unqualifiedly recommend for heavy pike and muskie. Properly handled, we will

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guarantee the rod against breaking on a fish." I secured the heavier rod, and, strange to say, it weighed but half an ounce more than the so-called "light bass," though it seemed much larger in the butt joint and was of the same length as the first. I tested the rod out, then used either as I happened to feel like doing, and when I took my record fish was handling the lighter tool. Whatever the opinion of the maker, I would go up against any great pike or muskellunge that ever flipped a fin with that light rod and without a fear for its integrity, either.

At the same time I wrote the makers of the Bristol No. 33, asking them if they would recommend that rod for muskellunge and great pike of *avoidupois*. Back came the answer by return post, "Most certainly!" After that reply I honestly *tried* to break the rod, playing many a heavy fish from the rod instead of reel, as one should, actually "pumping fish" with it, but the "33" never complained to the extent of a set even. Take the "33" in "De Luxe" dress, and you have the ideal great pike and muskellunge rod. Oh, I know scores and scores of anglers will rise up to curse, but the truth must needs be spoken, the truth as I see it. Needless to add, I have no interest in the Bristol rod nor any other. I am a simple, honest fisherman.

I have said nothing of length and construction, having discussed all that in the previous volume, "Casting Tackle and Methods," so will only say: Employ the regular five-foot or five-foot six-inch rod, split-bamboo or steel. Do not be tempted into purchasing a longer than the five-foot six-inch caster, either the one-piece in split-bamboo or the long tip,



SOME CASTING TACKLE

GREAT PIKE AND LUNGE LURES

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. South Bend "Min Buck." | 5. "Chippewa." |
| 2. South Bend "Underwater." | 6. "Shovel-nosed Wobbler." |
| 3. Jamison's "Mascot." | 7. "Surf-Oreno." |
| 4. "Rush Tango." | 1, 2, and 5 are underwaters. |

FOUR OF THE AUTHOR'S SELF-SPOOLING REELS

1. South Bend "Anti-Backlash," with level-winder.
2. "Fluger Supreme," free-spool, self-thumber, self-spooler.
3. Shakespeare, "Marhoff," simple level-winder.
4. "Beetzels," free-spool, self-thumber, level-winder.

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short butt construction. Of course in steel the number of joints is not of supreme importance. But—and listen to me—for great pike fishing get a *good* rod.

In the matter of reels there is a constantly broadening field for selection, and the angler should remember that there is no single "best" reel for any given fishing, writers to the contrary notwithstanding. Every angler sufficiently experienced to be allowed space in a magazine for an expression of preference naturally will have a favorite reel, and for him it is the *best*. How many quarrels would be obviated if angling writers would learn to say "My favorite reel is" instead of "The proper reel is" or "The best reel is." How many times I have had my anger stirred, unreasonably, I admit, but stirred nevertheless, by some angler whose cocksureness as to what constitutes the best reel or rod is equaled only by the theoretical theologian. Remember, please, that while your favorite reel may be *best* for you, there is a chance that mine is *best* for me.

My favorite reel for great pike casting is a level-winder, and with as large a spool as it is possible to place behind the level-winding device. Such a winch will cost money, but it will last a lifetime if handled properly, carefully cleaned, and sent back to the factory once in a while for readjustment. The advantages of the level-winder, or, as it is sometimes called, self-spooler, are too obvious to require enlargement here. One can bend all his energies to playing the fish; need not keep his eye on the reel-spool all the time, a little matter which bulks large in the day-long enjoyment. Be sure and select a reel large enough to handle with ease at least fifty yards of line, size E,

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say, which should test in the neighborhood of twenty-three pounds. Muskellunge and great pike lines are built to test up to forty pounds, but I doubt if it is ever necessary to employ such a "rope" in casting artificial lures; indeed, to my mind, the weight would militate against distance and control, as it would interfere in playing the fish. My largest great pike was taken on a size G line, testing only eighteen pounds, which, in the great majority of cases, would be sufficiently strong. The modern great pike fisherman does not expect to drag a fish around in the water as the small boy drags his toy boat.

As to lures, I would simply say, select standard bass attractors, though the hooks should be somewhat larger, stronger, and well attached. The smashing power of a great pike's jaws is considerable. Always there should be a tail-hook, something not needed for bass. There is no necessity, as I see it, for the large, many-hooked lures sometimes illustrated in catalogues and displayed in tackle-store windows. Undoubtedly a full-grown great pike can swallow the largest artificial lure upon the market, but you cannot handle it with the regulation casting rod, neither is there any necessity that you should. I once saw a man fishing for muskellunge upon a Northern Minnesota lake, and his "caster" was a regulation six-foot tarpon rod, to which he had attached a salt-water reel containing 300 feet of line! Wait, there is more. He was using live bait—ten-inch suckers! He caught some good fish, too. Just the same, the real heart-joy of angling was not for him. Parenthetically: Just the other day I picked up an outdoor magazine in which a writer recommended suckers a foot long as muskellunge bait.

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Such a fish may make a good "bait," I am not saying it will not, but I do say that there is more sport, *fun*, if you please, in taking heavy fish on light tackle, tackle that cannot be employed in casting "young suckers."

Another matter, a little thing but vastly important, always provide the lure with a steel trace or wire gimp; for when any pike "strikes over" its sharp teeth are sure to sever the line. I know of nothing in the whole realm of angling quite so heart-rending as to have a large fish depart, taking with him some choice lure. I have enjoyed (?) the experience a number of times and therefore I know whereof I speak. A wire gimp costs but a few cents, and is comparable to a life insurance policy in the midst of a smallpox epidemic. Do not neglect it. My largest great pike came in fast to a Heddon "dummy double," the lure out of sight in the fish's mouth, while its teeth clinched the wire gimp ferociously but unavailingly.

So much for tackle proper, though there are a few other articles which should be included in every great pike fisher's outfit. The ordinary landing-net is not adapted to pike fishing unless unusually large and strong and preceded by the quieting "gun" or club. A good, strong-throated gaff is much better. I have tried the so-called "automatic gaffs," two much-advertised makes, but both failed to penetrate the fish's hide. The shape of a great pike's body is such that it slips out of the nippers. Try it and see. Anyway, the things are the refinement of cruelty. A good thick club to whack the fish on the head, or, better, a 32-caliber revolver with which to give the capture his quietus while yet in the water, will save many a fish

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and obviate much strong language. Every outfit should contain a file or hook-hone, for the hard bones of a great pike's mouth will quickly dull even the best of hand-forged hooks. A disgorging is of little use with a multi-hooked lure, but here is a simple contrivance which every pike fisherman should carry: A steel spring which can be inserted in the fish's mouth, holding the jaws open while the hook is being removed. One cannot be too careful of wounds from a pike's teeth, for they are painful, hard to heal, and generally troublesome. A little tube of iodine in the tackle-box with which to paint a scratch at once is well worth while. So much for outfit and additions thereto.

I can say but little as to the method of casting, for the wise great pike enthusiast employs the same tactics that the bass fan finds successful. As has already been pointed out, great pike are not as much given to tree tops and rocky beds as are bass, though the shadow of a log is not to be neglected as you work your way along a lake shore. It is to weed beds and grassy shores you will pay the most attention, for those spots are beloved of the great pike. The cast should be made directly to the edge of the bed. If there are open spots back in the field and the weeds are of such character that you can coax a fish through them, then cast into the open places; but I warn you that such ventures are to be made only in fear and trembling, a sort of last resort, for disaster lurks close upon the heels of such casts. Sometimes a great pike will strike upon the instant, though ordinarily he will wait for the lure to move away, sometimes following it questioningly, suspiciously, a characteristic of the whole family, from little pickerel to lordly muskellunge.

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In retrieving the lure, do so by "fits and starts," a method which seems to tickle the imagination of the fish or stirs his anger. Often when so deviled, he will attack the lure or over-run it, in any event hook himself.

I have already warned the reader that a heavy fish is to be played from the reel rather than with the rod, though the rod ably seconds the efforts of the reel. The backbone of a five-ounce split-bamboo is not stiff enough to do battle with a twenty-pound great pike. It should keep a sufficient tension upon the line to prevent the fish from throwing out the hook, a not very difficult feat, once the fish secures a little slack. Do not be afraid to give the capture line; let him run; that is what you have a reel for. The more he moves, the quicker he will become exhausted. Play him. If he is lazy and refuses to move, make him. More than once I have tired a big great pike by paddling about while the hooked fish was simply towed behind. Always be sure your fish is thoroughly exhausted before you attempt to use the gaff, and remember, the shooting should come before the gaff. It is surprising how much vitality a great pike has stored up in his body. He is never captured until in the boat or upon the shore.

While lure-casting is best from a boat, I have had unalloyed pleasure in casting from the shore. Shore casting is to be resorted to only as a last choice; that is, unless you are one of the seldom anglers who can brook disappointment and broken tackle. There are so many odds in the fish's favor—logs, trees, rooty stumps, rocks, and, last but not least, treacherous currents. To tire a big fish, reel him to your feet, then have the current pick him up and sweep him away, is

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an experience which may be good for one's soul, but it is heart-breaking at the time.

One of the best fights I ever saw a great pike put up, one I hooked near the mouth of the Chippewa, River, a Wisconsin stream, conducted. "Conducted" is right, for, for full fifteen minutes the fish engineered the doings. I was casting for bass at the foot of a rocky ledge; that is, I had been casting all along the rocks without results, then walked down to an eddy below them, a bit of water more ideal for pike than bass. I cast clear across the eddy to a fringe of pickerel weed upon the far side. I thought I had struck a snag, for my hook stuck. To my surprise, I found that I was fast in a good fish. He sulked, some hundred feet away. I pulled steadily (my tackle was of the best) until I had coaxed him out into the current, then he suddenly awakened, and for twenty minutes kept me very busy indeed. Three times I had him at my feet. Three times he managed to secure the advantage of the strong current and was swept away. I all but despaired of gaffing him. Once he leaped in a hog-wallowing way, shaking himself, having secured sufficient slack line for the maneuver. For a few seconds I was mightily worried, for there are no more dangerous tactics resorted to by any of the pikes. Hooks held, line remained true. In the end I landed the fish without assistance, though it was no credit to me, for I had shouted lustily for aid, but there was none to hear. That one battle looms largest on my mental horizon of all my contests with great pike. Not because it was an unusually big fish, and it was a good one, reported in the newspapers; but because of the surroundings and the length of the struggle, a full half-hour.

CHAPTER VI

Great Pike and Live Bait

"The mediocrity of pike as a game fish is doubtless a just estimation in a majority of cases, but once in a while one will exhibit game qualities that will surprise the most doubting and contemptuous angler, compelling his admiration and forcing him to admit that there are exceptions to all rules, more especially in fishing."—*Dr. James A. Henshall.*

THE great pike is a lover of live bait, I sometimes imagine, putting up a better fight when caught on a minnow or frog than when taken with artificial lures, though perhaps the belief is another of my angling whims. This fact enters in, however, that on live bait there is ordinarily but a single hook, while the usual artificial lure is possessed of several trebles. Three sets of trebles fast in a great pike's jaw are quite apt to take the fight out of an otherwise combative individual. A word to the wise is sufficient.

There is no question but that the use of artificial lure is the cleaner and—shall I say it?—more sportsmanlike method. There are days and waters, however, when and where live bait will prove more availing. He who refuses to use live bait at all shall be, to misquote Father Izaak, "a bit superstitious." By the way, I am always suspicious of the angler who "never" uses anything but artificial flies or casting lures of some sort, feeling that perhaps it would be a good idea to go through the pockets of his fishing-coat carefully. Be that as it may, the man who employs live

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bait upon occasion, and knows how to handle it, is sure of a few good fish, when the faddist must needs return empty handed.

All members of the pike family are preëminently bait fish, from the little pickerel up to the fighting muskellunge. One has but to observe the habits of the fish to satisfy himself of the truthfulness of the assertion. For four years I lived near a chain of lakes—might almost say lived *on* them—that contained great pike of fighting propensities and avoirdupois, and, being something of a fish student as well as angler, naturally availed myself of the opportunity for observation. I discovered that the fish had well-defined lairs and ranges. To toss a small chub or sucker anywhere near a given point was to invite an attack nine times out of ten. Naturally it follows that when the sucker or chub was attached to a hook and the bait cast in a skillful manner, the great pike was hooked, though not always brought to gaff. The hooking of a big great pike is the least part of the game.

I had a fighting acquaintance with one monster (I think he would have weighed in the neighborhood of twenty-five pounds), which I had named "Big Arthur," in honor of an eccentric lad who haunted the lake and often fished with me. "Big Arthur" had his home in a bed of water lilies near the upper end of the lake, where the water shoaled sharply from thirty feet to four or five. Naturally that weed-bed was the home of sunfish, bluegills, and perch, a matter which "Big Arthur" knew right well. Sometimes the latter lay in the weeds just at the edge of the bed, and when some hapless, reckless "punkin' seed" ventured into the open, he more often paid toll with his life than returned to

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his home to tell of his adventures. It was while fishing for well-beloved "sunnies" in a pocket amid the weeds—for I love to fish for the little fellows with a two-and-one-half-ounce fly rod, and have an appetite for sunnies rolled in cracker crumbs and fried in sweet butter—that I was "introduced" to "Big Arthur." When I saw him dash out from his lair not ten feet distant from my location and capture an unfortunate perch, I mentally resolved to try conclusions with him.

Hastily I fastened a four-inch perch to a strong hook which I had in my tackle-box, and sent the little fellow hurtling through the air to land "plop!" right where the attack had been made. Nothing resulted, and I thought that I caught a glimpse of a shadowy form slipping through the water. When too late, I told myself what a fool I had been. "Big Arthur" was not in the habit of having his fish come flying through the air to land right in front of him with noise and commotion. Long life had made him sly and wise beyond his kind.

Next morning I was in my position betimes and ready for the battle, but my friend the enemy was not at home; "off his feed," suspicious, or something; at any rate, I failed to make connections or even catch a glimpse of his greenish-gray body. Then I rested the pool for a week, and one night as the heavy shades crept in from the east I quietly drew a sunfish through the water over his lurking-place. That time I connected up all right—and still have a broken three and one-half-ounce caster as a memento of the battle. So it went all that season and the next. Now and then I would see the fish, once in a blue moon induce him to strike, semi-occasionally—fifteen times during the

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two years—hook him. Always something happened—not always because of a lack of skill on my part—and the fish escaped. Then Fate decreed that I should move from that locality, and my one great regret in leaving was that "Big Arthur" still lorded it over the lesser fry at the head of Clark's Lake. Some day I am going back there and try conclusions with him once more, for of course he still is waiting for me, though a dozen and more years have sped since our first friendly battle.

When casting live bait—with perhaps the exception of frogs—for large and "educated" great pike, I much doubt the wisdom of noisy casting, such as is so attractive with bass. Better far, if possible, allow the bait to slip into the water without any commotion whatsoever. Again and again I have fastened a minnow in the weeds in such a manner that I could release it with a gentle jerk, row my boat to a position 150 to 200 feet away, and wait half an hour for the water to quiet down, then pull my bait over the known lurking place of some ultra-wise great pike. Taking the matter by and large, the user of live bait should attempt to duplicate natural conditions. To my mind there is more sport in circumventing some aged and wise great pike, a fish that has defied anglers for seasons without number, than in capturing many less educated individuals. And the way to capture such fish is with live bait used intelligently.

In the matter of what bait to use, the angler will study the feeding habits of the great pike in the particular water to be fished. It is a mistaken notion that a man, simply because he is a good caster, can go to an unfamiliar water and catch as many fish as the

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man acquainted with every deep and shallow, as well as knowing when and upon what the great pike feed. The reason why the country boy with a tamarack pole and cotton line catches more fish than the rodster with his expensive outfit is not a matter of paraphernalia, but of water and fish knowledge. Give the scientific angler the same intimate acquaintanceship with lake and stream, and he will discount the native 50 per cent. Time and again, when I have become thoroughly familiar with a trout stream, I have caught two fish to every one taken by my Indian guide. With but three days to spend upon a great pike water, I am thoroughly convinced that if the angler were to spend two of them, from earliest dawn to dark, studying water and feeding times as well as food, he would catch more than enough fish on the third day to make up for the two spent in study. There is no defeating the angler who knows. However, I am free to confess that I have never been able to curb my impatience for two days.

For all waters probably there is no more attractive minnow than the shiner, say from four inches up to six. I have in mind the flat silver white minnow, such as can usually be caught along the edges of weed-beds in lakes and wide streams. A glass fish-trap baited with breadcrumbs, a seine or dip-net will take them, though I prefer to catch them with a minnow hook and line, for those so caught are usually of the correct size; and, wherever possible, I like to take them from the very water in which I am to fish for great pike, for those are the most alluring. Quickly released from the hook, with moist hands to prevent breaking the protecting slime, and placed in a double minnow bucket,

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they will remain alive for several hours, provided the bucket is not too crowded. A dozen minnows should be amply sufficient for a half-day's fishing. As a close second I would place the ordinary chub and sucker, giving perch, sunfish, and small bluegills third place. By the way, few anglers realize what a splendid bait sunfish or bream make. Again and again I have been surprised to find members of the pike family taking the little "gold dollars" with avidity, especially in waters inhabited by them. Perhaps I should say here that as a rule successful bait for any given water is determined largely by the natural food found therein. It is next to useless to fish with a "foreign" bait.

A very good bait in some waters, especially for trolling, which will be discussed further along, is the common green or meadow frog. I have found the brown frog utterly unattractive times without number, and must warn anglers against it. The meadow frog, so-called, though perhaps some of my readers are acquainted with it under the name of leopard frog, is a splendid casting bait for any member of the pike family, save for large muskellunge. Of course, as was suggested in the foregoing paragraph, in water where frogs are not found, where there are no environing marshes and "froggy land," the gymnastic batrachian is apt to prove a disappointment. For obvious reasons great pike are not in the habit of feeding upon them. That bait alone upon which the fish is accustomed to feed is sure to prove attractive. Of course one *may* take a great pike with a frog from waters uninhabited by batrachians, but by and large, it is not the part of wisdom to employ frogs where sunfish and shiners are the every-day diet. That the great pike will upon

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occasion take anything edible or near edible is a well-known characteristic of the family. I have more than once taken good great pike up to four pounds upon angle worms.

While upon the question of baits, I would like to mention one seldom resorted to because of the trouble of securing it, as well as the difficulty the caster experiences in fastening it to his hook. I refer to mice. I am free to confess that I do not know how to attach a mouse to a hook, and am only glad to get it half fastened if I can escape with whole fingers. A mouse possesses teeth. Perhaps some ambitious angler will yet invent a "mouse harness," and so win thanks, fame, and fortune. Till that time arrives I must pass this best of baits with but a word. The mouse should be so fastened to the hook that it is free to swim upon the surface, and there is little for the rodster to do save cast it where it should go.

I once used a mouse very successfully. I was spending a little time at a great pike water, a grassy, weedy lake fairly alive with the wicked gentry, but notwithstanding their numerousness I failed to secure a good fish. So one day I captured a mouse under a "figure-four trap," chloroformed it, and while it was quiescent wired the body to a double hook, to which I attached a trailer. By the time I reached my chosen fishing ground, my bait was very lively; indeed, I was worried for fear that it might escape from my hook altogether and run amuck in the boat. My first cast with the somewhat unusual bait was a good one, well in amid the fringing cat-tails, and Mr. Mouse set out for shore. Hardly had half a minute passed before a splendid great pike had him, and I was hard and fast in the heaviest fish

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of the trip. And yet the bait does not appeal to me; seems "unsportsmanlike;" though why a live frog should be sportsmanlike and a live mouse unsportsmanlike it is hard to see. Probably we shall never be able to settle that much-argued question to the satisfaction of all.

Perhaps, so long as I have been discussing live bait, it would be well to begin my remarks upon tackle with the hook, for that surely is closely connected with bait. In great pike fishing the hook should be large and strong. There is little danger of selecting one too large; the fish can manage anything, and the jaws are almost viselike in crushing power. There are some very good minnow and frog harnesses upon the market, but where they come with hooks already attached, the latter are seldom strong enough to hold a big great pike. A small hook is easily swallowed, a matter to be avoided wherever possible. For average great pike fishing, I would say get a No. 1-0 hook—it will prove none too large—to which must be attached a strong wire gimp or leader; for when the fish "strikes over," unless the line be protected by such gimp the fish and hook will be lost. Some day someone will produce a frog harness and minnow hook built especially for great pike fishing. Till then we who fish for large *Esox* must content ourselves with large-sized regular hooks.

I much prefer hooking the bait through the head, from below upwards. Yes, I know the minnow soon dies, which happens after a few casts, anyway, no matter how hooked. Sometimes anglers insert the hook in the minnow's mouth, out through the gills, and back through the body. Very good, were it not

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for the fact that the minnow soon doubles down on the hook-shank and whirls like a spoon when drawn through the water instead of traveling naturally. There is just one way of attaching a minnow or frog to a single hook, and that is through the head; but as all members of the pike family are in the habit of striking from the rear (unlike bass), unless they reach far enough over the bait to be impaled upon the hook, the bait is severed and the fish escapes. Every great pike fisherman knows the vexation of short-striking. It is an easy matter to use two hooks, either a gang built especially for the work or a second hook attached by its ring to the first. More than once I have made a "great-pike gang," wiring the body of the minnow or frog to the shank of the second hook, to the conquering of "lazy" great pike.

Every rodster is acquainted with the casting spoon to which an auxiliary hook is attached, and every caster of live bait for great pike should be. (We will not enter into a discussion regarding the ethics of the matter here, why it is "unsportsmanlike" to use a spoon in combination with a live bait.) When live bait has ceased to be alive, or when using preserved bait, the spoon is a great aid, as it serves to attract the fish's attention to the morsel of food and perhaps serves to make it appear in a lifelike manner. I know from many an experience that it is a fish-taker. Such a spoon (the blade should not be large like those usually found upon trolls) will not interfere with casting to any great extent, as it does not offer much resistance to the atmosphere and is little affected by the wind.

All that was said in the previous chapter concerning

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the importance of leader or gimp, and emphasized in this, should be held in mind at all times, no matter what the bait or lure under consideration. To lose one record fish by having the line cut by a great pike's teeth is enough to last a fisherman for several seasons.

Above the hook, I have not much to add to what was said concerning tackle in the foregoing chapter upon artificial lure casting. I would employ practically the same reel, some type of level-winder like the "Shakespeare," "Beetzel," "Supreme," "Heddon's," or "Southbend." The line would be one I knew to be strong enough for the work, though as light as is consistent with safety. I might use a heavier rod, depending upon the weight of the bait to be handled. I would not jeopardize a light caster by attempting to cast a minnow weighing four or five ounces, as I have seen men do. If I thought it necessary to use a young fish for bait, I would select a somewhat heavy rod to handle it. Personally, I much doubt the advisability of employing an overly large minnow for casting, upon the theory that a large bait insures a large fish. More often I think the practice results in a lost fish. The ordinary casting rod will handle a two- or three-ounce minnow without difficulty. A heavier bait should be thrown from the tip of a rod somewhat thicker in the waist—more stalky and somewhat stiffer, consequently slightly heavier in weight. However, every ounce the caster adds to his rod is subtracting a definite thrill from the battle. The great pike fisherman who will not take a chance, court a thrill, is missing one of the joys of the sport.

The actual casting of live bait does not differ much from casting artificial lures, save, as a rule, the object



A PAIR OF GREAT PIKE

Courtesy L. E. Cavalier, Cable, Wis.

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of the caster is not to make a great commotion upon the surface of the water when the bait strikes. We are now fishing with a fish for a fish, and our object is to duplicate nature. Every angler has seen a minnow dart along the surface, closely pursued by a hungry great pike. That should be a sufficient hint. There are times when to "skitter" a minnow along the surface, allowing it to sink slowly at the end of the movement, will bring results. As a rule, however, I cast toward the shore if fishing from a boat, allowing the minnow or frog to sink for a few seconds, then slowly—note I say *slowly*—reel in. My object in casting is to get the bait to slip into the water without excitement or commotion. With me, noise and splashing are taboo.

To cast a live bait with skill and accuracy is something of a task. I honestly believe there are fewer good casters of live bait to-day than there are handlers of artificial lures. I mean in proportion to the number fishing, of course. There was a time when we were students of live-bait fishing, but that day is long since past, though I expect to see a revival of the sport. Perhaps I shall lay myself open to criticism when I say that it requires more skill to cast live bait properly than it does to handle a plug, but nevertheless such is my conviction. Watch the average bait-caster handling minnows, and draw your own conclusions.

The regular lurking place for great pike, such as are investigated by the lure handler, should be carefully fished out by the bait fisherman, who should remember that he is fishing with the natural food of the great pike, and endeavor to simulate the actions of that food when unattached to hook and line. Logs, stumps,

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weed-beds, deep "holes," all should be thoroughly investigated and conscientiously fished out, slowly and methodically. Never should the rodster be tempted to hurry, for haste is always destructive of highest art, and, believe me, properly casting live bait is an art. Care must be exercised both at the beginning and end of a cast, or the bait will be torn from the hook. As the "back cast" is the danger point in fly casting, so oftentimes it is in handling live bait. The cast should not be begun too quickly and sharply. Ginger should be injected after the bait is in motion.

I have been writing of live-bait fishing for great pike as though it were a sport to be indulged in only from the vantage ground of a boat, though the truth of the matter is, a wise and careful angler can cast successfully from the shore. My largest great pike was taken from the shore, and on a green frog at that. Local conditions must govern when, where, and how. I, nor no man, can tell how, nor when, nor where on paper. As the wise bass fan does not cast "any old place" for his chosen game, so the great pike fisher must not expect to win out "going it blind." Let him study the water and the feeding habits of the great pike therein. While, by and large, great pike agree in their general habits, voraciousness, love of solitude, and deep, quiet swims, still there are little differences in the habits of fish dwelling even in contiguous water, the knowledge of which marks the successful angler.

It is wonderful what a cool and expert rodster can make his captures do, what obstacles he can overcome. Not so long ago I was casting on a mill pond where numberless logs were floating, confined by a

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continuous "boom." The deep water lay within the boom and I was upon the shore. So I cast some fifty feet beyond the boom and, as luck would have it, hooked a big—for the water—great pike. Fortunately, the bank upon which I was standing was somewhat elevated above the surface of the water. Reeling in as rapidly as I could get the fish to travel, I waited until he was at the edge of the boom, then, holding the tip of my rod high in air, I gave a sudden strong jerk of the line, with the result that the great pike leaped out of the water and fell upon my side—the shore side—of the boom. "Luck?" Well, perhaps, but it worked out as I planned it. The fact of the matter is, the resourceful angler can overcome almost any difficulty, circumvent the most crafty great pike, if he only *thinks* he can and keeps his head.

Naturally, not all rivers, and few lakes, can be fished from the shore. Ofttimes, usually, the water near the shore is shallow, or obstructions upon the bank make casting impossible. Yet it is surprising how much fishing the shore angler can get if he but keeps at it. I have even waded out into a lake waist-deep and cast successfully, something of a trick, as the reader will find if he undertakes it. Once I hooked a goodly great pike, so standing, and the fish dashed between my legs, to the travail of my soul and the fish's liberty, not to mention the result of the taut line against my bare legs.

Still-fishing for great pike with live bait has not been productive of results with me. I can count the fish so caught upon the fingers of one hand, perhaps because the waters fished were not adapted to the

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sport, though I am under the impression that still-fishing is uniformly unsuccessful.* The great pike is as much the caster's fish as is the famous black bass, and the casting of live bait is, to my mind, the method that will take the sly old denizen of avoirdupois and experience, suspicious of unnatural lures and spoons. If the reader knows of some "Old Arthur" that has successfully defied the caster of lures, my best advice to him is, try live bait—minnow, frog, or *mouse*.

Always the rodster should exhaust his fish before attempting to net or gaff. The heavy fish should be stunned before either is used. A revolver or pistol is a handy thing to have, lacking which, a good, thick club may be made to serve, though it should be handled with care. A blow across the line or leader is disastrous. I watched a man playing a good great pike in Lake Superior, a large one (there are some big ones taken from its cold waters) and liberate his capture by a misdirected blow. "How did it ever happen?" Easy enough. The fish was not thoroughly exhausted, and when the fisherman struck, the fish flopped, and that was the end of the story. Be sure the great pike is played until played out. A gaff is a better landing tool than a net, obviously, and it should be well made, strong of hook, throat, and haft.

Let no one laugh at the user of live bait for great pike. He is the man that will get the large fish, all else being equal, as will be emphasized times without number probably throughout this work, whether he angles for pickerel, great pike, or muskellunge. Three times in my experience I have won out where others

* See Appendix II, "Still Fishing with Live Bait."

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failed, twice by employing minnows and once by the use of frogs, not to include the few occasions when I have resorted to the unusual mouse bait. After all, there is more in live-bait fishing than the disciple of plugs or the user of spoons realizes.

NOTE.—For some years I have been busy experimenting with live bait and live-bait tackle, gathering data everywhere, the results being set down in my forthcoming "Fishing with Live Bait," a book considerably larger than this. The whole question of live-bait fishing is thoroughly discussed, from finding and keeping the bait to how to handle it upon lake and stream. The reader of this chapter, interested in the subject, is invited to secure the work.

CHAPTER VII

Fly-Fishing for Great Pike

" . . . Pike-fishing, in fact, has been with me the hobby—the hobby, I might almost say—of a life."—*H. Cholmondeley-Pennell.*

IN Chapter IV I discussed fly-fishing for pickerel, speaking of tackle as well as methods, though naturally I did not go into the matter exhaustively, that fish being so "unimportant." However, I wish to reassert what was emphasized there: Fly-fishing for pickerel, provided proper tools are used, is an enjoyable game and worth-while sport, whatever one may think of the fish when killed and in the pan.

When we turn to the great pike, fly-rod in hand, all is changed; the possibilities for sport raised to the nth power. Imagine a nineteen-pound, cold-water-bred, fighting pike on a twelve-ounce rod, say. I can assure the reader—a recent experience in mind—that such a proposition spells trouble with a capital "T." Perhaps it might be as well for me to spin the yarn right here in the opening of the chapter, as it teaches some things that the fisherman must learn if he is to cope successfully with that combative werewolf of northern waters.

I am fortunate enough to possess a little cottage on Chequamegon Bay, so near the main lake as to be almost in Superior itself. Some miles up the bay is the mouth of a slough, which extends well back in-

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land, the abandoned mouth of a river. Now, that slough is deep and marged with pickerel weed, water arum, and other aquatic plants. Naturally, it is the home of numberless great pike and pickerel, for while perhaps it is not generally known, Lake Superior's sloughs or bayous, as they are sometimes called, afford excellent great pike fishing. Some of the finest catches of great pike seen by me in recent years have come from Kagagan, not far from Ashland, Wisconsin. What is true of the sloughs visited by me is true, I think, of the great majority of those along the South Shore of that Great Lake at least. I am constantly surprised that this section is not more often visited by the lovers of the giant *Esox*. The fish run large. Where the waters have not been fished hard, I have seen them weighing in the neighborhood of forty pounds, and I have reason to believe that larger fish may yet be taken.

One cool September morning just as the tardy sun was rising from his watery bed I set out for the slough, crouched in my light canoe, for I am one of those fellows who like to add a spice of danger to great-pike fishing by employing a canoe, though I do not want to be understood as recommending the craft for the sport. I had left my casting rod in the cottage—for the temptation is always to use that efficient tool for great pike—taking instead a nine-ounce fly-rod, nine and one-half feet long, rather thick in the waist, but possessed of sufficient backbone to shoot a heavy fly remarkably well. The reel was an aluminum quadruple, built for fly-fishing, without the balance handle. (I understand that only a few of those reels were made, but I cannot understand why they might

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not become popular for heavy fishing if constructed from some other material. Aluminum is too soft a metal for reels.) The fly for the morning was a rather large buck-tail with a red "tag," a conspicuous fly on dark water and one that has proven uniformly attractive to great pike.

Reaching the field of operation, I sent the light craft along just within casting distance of the fringing weeds and grass, for it is never the part of wisdom when doing any fishing to "stretch the cast," to cast beyond control. Not a breeze ruffled the surface, something which obtains usually only early in the morning along Superior's fretful shore. I cast easily, the hair and feather fly landing with a little splash just at the edge of a bed of pickerel weed, a plant which my readers will remember Father Walton thought mothered the mighty "Luce." Probably because my mind was busy with the ancient history of the fish I was seeking, I missed my first rise. There was a splash, a flash of green and white, and a fish shot from the weeds into the depths. I did not cast a second time, for the fish had gone out and down, and some little time, I knew, would elapse before my game would return to his lair. I beg the reader to remember that the great pike is not only a lover of solitude, but he is also more shy than he is given credit with being by most fishermen. While the fish will often follow a lure right up to a boat's side, the angler will discover that he will take more fish in the course of a day's casting if he deport himself as though his quarry were as shy as the speckled denizen of our cold-water brooklets.

A resounding splash "like a log falling into the water" notified me that somewhere above a mighty leviathan

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was feeding. Without casting, and disturbing the water as little as possible with my paddle, I edged my light craft along. (Therein lies the great advantage of the canoe for any fishing—quietness and ease in handling.) Slowly I made my way upward, ever on the lookout for the leviathan's lurking place. A bed of spatter-dock, with a forest of cat-tails close inshore, held my attention, my fish sense telling me that it must be the home of the monster whose plunge I had heard.

Replacing my combination buck-tail with an exaggerated scarlet ibis of my own manufacture, I sent the bunch of brilliant feathers through the air, to land with an audible "plop" just at the edge of the floating broad leaves. Nothing stirred, so I waited for the fly to sink. As the feathers were dry, perhaps three minutes passed before the little spot of color disappeared beneath the surface. Then, with the "jerk-and-wait" movement, I began to reel in the line. Before the lure had traveled far, came a rush, a mighty wallowing splash, and my rod was bending perilously, while the thrumming line whispered of danger. Then was disclosed the advantage of a multiplying reel for great pike fly-fishing. I was compelled to fight the fish in a circumscribed area. Remember, I was in a narrow slough, comparable to a river, with weed- and reed-marged shores upon either side. The first act of the fish was to rush to, and under, the canoe. It was but the act of a second on my part to throw a loop of line around the bow and gently snub my capture before he reached the protection of the weeds upon the far side. How he fought to enter them! Wallowing upon the surface, throwing up a smother of spray.

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I trembled for the integrity of my tackle, wishing, it must be confessed, for a heavier rod. But Fate was kind that morning, for the fish became possessed of another idea, and shot straight down the slough, lake-ward. I was content to let him go, knowing that my reel held full 200 feet of new line. (It never is the part of wisdom to fish for great pike with an old, worn-out line.)

I wondered, as I watched the line disappear from the spool, if the fish had started for the Soo at the foot of the Great Lakes. Reaching the sandbar at the mouth of the slough and evidently fearing the shallow water, he turned and made directly for me with all the speed of a reckless autoist. I reeled like mad, blessing my quadruple fly-reel, as I realized that I was able to keep a taut line upon my capture. (Beg pardon—*hooked fish*.) Passing near the canoe, I caught a glimpse of his magnificent proportions and imagined that he was longer and heavier than a certain mounted specimen that graces the place of honor above a well-remembered fireplace. I grudgingly gave him line, made him fight for every inch, tiring him as best I could. For the way to fight a great pike on a fly-rod is to fight him. Never let the fish conduct the battle: that is the prerogative of the fisherman.

A fault-finding correspondent, who can see no sport in fly-fishing for members of the pike family, writes: "But a great pike or pickerel will not leap from the water, as does a bass or salmon." No, not as does a bass or salmon, but as a great pike. The leap of the great pike, while not as finished and spectacular as that of the small-mouth, say, is no less confusing, dangerous, and tackle-testing. He throws himself

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awkwardly from the water, seldom, if ever, clearing it, but managing somehow to fall upon the line three times out of five unless the angler be learned in the fish's ways and more than a tyro with fly tackle. That a five-, ten-, or fifteen-pound fish falling upon a line will work havoc with the best of tackle, no rodster needs be told. The leap of a twenty- or thirty-pound fish, especially if near the boat, is something to witness and dream about when angling days are over.

Believing, perhaps, that he could play the trick, or leaping, maybe, in an excess of terror, my capture reared—I do not know how better to express it—and, I honestly believe, *tumbled over backward!* But failing to fall upon the taut line, the tactic availed him nothing. Again he was away for the weeds, but a steady strain discouraging, he gave up, went to the bottom and sulked. But I would none of that, stirring him up with strength of line and rod alone. Again on the surface, he wallowed like a bathing elephant. But manifestly he was weakening, and I was glad of it, for arm and eye were weary. The first time I brought him alongside, the sight of the boat sent him scurrying away with a sudden access of strength; but I only bided my time, for I knew it could not endure. Again I brought him in, and again he turned away in spite of me. I realized the end was near, transferred the rod to my left hand, placed the 22 pistol within easy reach, and reeled him in. A single shot between wicked, malevolent eyes, a moil of blood-flecked water, and I plunged home the gaff.

I have learned from much canoe fishing that it is never the part of wisdom to lift, or attempt to lift, such a fish into the boat when alone, if it can be avoided. So

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towing my capture at the stern, I paddled to the marshy shore and dragged the heavy body out upon the grass. To those who can see no beauty in the fish nor sport in its capture I only say, I wish you had been with me that morning. The battle had been great, just great, and I have been in at the finish of many a mighty bass and weighty rainbow. As to beauty, well, that spotted greenish-gray body, irradiant, scintillating, was not devoid of beauty. His had been a good fight, and he had surrendered only to the inevitable, and that would have been enough for me had he been as ugly in appearance as a bullhead. I wish to emphasize two points regarding the end of the fight: First, that I did not attempt to lift the fish into the canoe; second, that I killed the great pike with a well-directed shot before attempting to use the gaff. A fish of fifteen pounds and upward is something of a problem upon a gaff, unless stunned with a shot or blow before pricked with steel. Many a capsized canoeman and angler mourning loss of record fish will bear me out. Always play the great pike until exhausted, and then for two or three minutes, "just for good measure," before attempting to gaff.

What was that? "What did I do with the fish?" Foolish, foolish. Baked great pike is not to be sneezed at, as will appear when we reach the chapter upon cookery.

My excuse for narrating the foregoing incident is twofold: Its suggestiveness; and then, "It is not all of fishing to fish." If one could collect and publish the just-as-it-happened stories of anglers in various parts of the country, what a wealth of authoritative

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and entertaining information we would have at our command! The angling writer who cannot forget himself now and then and "just yarn" of his own experiences is, to my mind at least, hardly a good guide to follow. Strikes me that the majority of the angling writers of to-day take their job too seriously. We have lost our Primes, our "Adirondack" Murrays, our Fred Mathers, and their ilk, and, lo, in this strenuous time there are none bold enough, unless it be van Dyke, to take their place.

In fly-fishing for great pike, the wise angler will devote considerable time and thought to the selection of a rod, for more will depend upon that part of the outfit than upon all the rest of the paraphernalia. The rod can be somewhat longer and stiffer than those used for black bass, for more will be required of it. The salmon rod, by and large, is a good tool. I should say, then, for a general-purpose rod one weighing in the neighborhood of twelve ounces should be selected, though I have gone up against several doughty fish with my favorite nine-ounce black bass fly-rod. My reason for recommending the heavier tool is that sometimes the great pike fisherman will connect with a twenty- or thirty-pound fish, and then where would he be with a three-ounce rod? I saw one weighing twenty-nine pounds that was taken on a nine-ounce rod. But it is not wise to subject so light a rod to such a strain. The fly should be large and somewhat heavy; therefore, a heavy rod can be used with ease. A properly built twelve-ounce rod of either split-bamboo or solid wood will give the angler sufficient casting power and action when it comes to playing the fish.

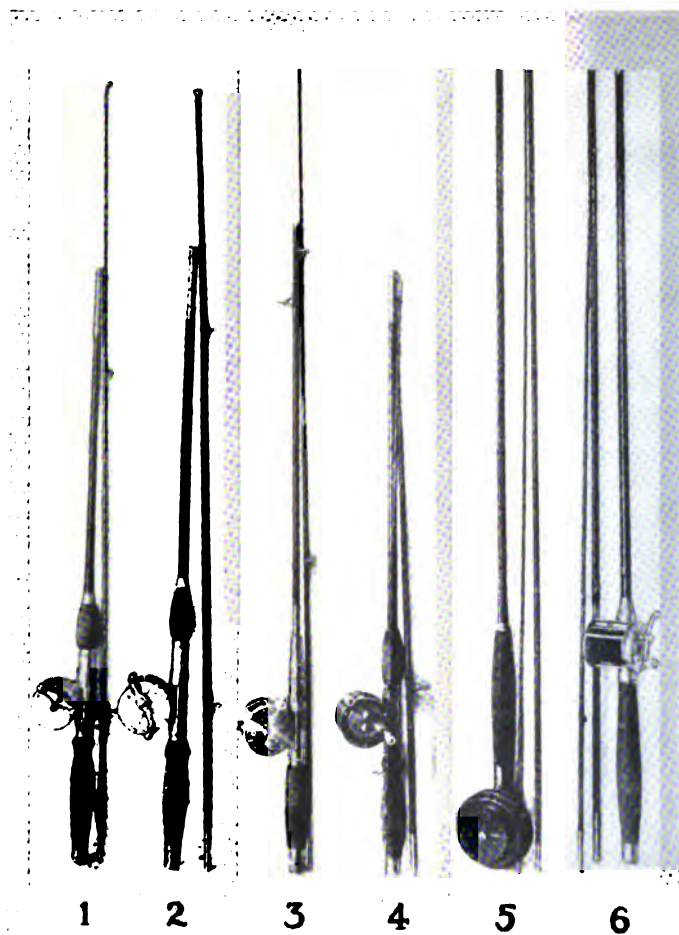
I have said that the rod is the most important item

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of the outfit, and will let that stand, but the line must be strong also. I use a rather heavy enameled line, such as is employed for salmon fishing, and have yet to find cause for complaint. Undoubtedly one could use an ordinary trout line (I once played and landed a two-pound black bass on an ordinary No. 60 cotton thread; nevertheless I am not recommending such thread for bass fishing), but it would be very unwise to run the risks. At least 100 yards of either size D or E should be about right. One could use the regular silk casting line, but it does not lend itself so admirably to fly-casting, and remember, fly-fishing for great pike is fly-casting, though the tackle may seem somewhat exaggerated to a user of $2\frac{1}{4}$ -ounce trout rods.

In the matter of a reel I am certain that as a rule I would select a double multiplier, though I have used large single-actions with supreme satisfaction. However, instant control of the line is a matter of paramount importance, and I find that that can be most happily secured by using a regulation multiplying reel. Of course in employing such a reel the off-set handle will bother to a certain extent, and the angler who cannot suffer a tangled reel handle with equanimity is strongly urged to provide himself with a regular single-action salmon winch. The reel should be wide of barrel and easy running, for the fish should be played from the reel, once it is hooked. Do not attempt to play the fish with the hand and with up-heaped line on the bottom of the boat. Confusion and disaster are almost certain to result.

When it comes to the selection of the fly, there is a wide field for choice. Of course, sometimes the large bass flies will prove availing, but they are most de-



SOME OF THE AUTHOR'S PIKE RODS

1. "Dowagiac," split-bamboo.
2. Solid wood, western yew, built by author.
3. De Lux, Bristol.
4. "Shakespeare," three-piece split-bamboo, 6'-6" long.
5. Seven-ounce split-bamboo fly-rod.
6. Stiff live-bait rod, 9'-6" long, split-bamboo, built by author.



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cidedly not recommended by the writer as a regular lure. The factory-built buck-tails, especially the white tabbed with red, are very good, though I do not see the necessity for the treble hooks ordinarily employed. I prefer a single hook. I have seldom experienced any difficulty in hooking a fish, once I have gotten him to rise. The hooking is a matter for the angler's wrist, as in all fly-fishing. If the angler has had any experience in building flies, is never so great a tyro, only knows how "to stick the feathers together," he should tie his own fuzzy wuzzies. The more flamboyant and outlandish the creation, the more attractive it will prove. Let red figure in every fly, is one of my cheerfully obeyed rules. I made one once out of black feathers, a large scraggly fly, with a streaming red tail, which in a certain northern river proved very attractive on bright days. As a rule, the fly will prove sufficiently weighty, once it is wet, to sink beneath the surface, and I have never found "floating flies" very successful for great pike. The fly should sink six or eight inches beneath the surface. If the fly is unusually light, one could weight with a wrapping of tinfoil or lead, but do not render the fly so heavy as to make the casting comparable to lure handling. Bear in mind that you are fly-fishing and deport yourself as a fly-fisher.

I am convinced that in fly-fishing for great pike the time of the day is not so much a matter of vital importance as in other handling of the feathery lures. I have found great pike rising at midday with avidity, and again I have discovered that they would not look at my most temptingly offered lures at midday, in the evening, or early morning. I think there is no more

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moody fish which the fly-fisher can rightly regard as his own than the great pike. When he will, he will; and when he won't, he won't. That is about all there is to it. In unrelieved hot weather, such as comes in midsummer, when most of us are compelled to take our vacations, undoubtedly the early morning hours, from six to nine o'clock, are the most prolific in rises. Strange to relate, I have had indifferent success in the evening as a rule, though there have been occasions when evenings have been good. When the atmosphere has been heavy, possessed of that something which we say presages a thunderstorm, I have found the fish rising freely. And, too, there have been days of this sort when I failed utterly to bring them to the surface, though they would take an under-water or live bait freely. Again, let me emphasize what I have said before: When it comes to fly-fishing at least, the great pikes are about as moody fishes as flirt caudal fins in the eager angler's face.

The methods of the great pike fisher might fittingly be described as emphasized or exaggerated black bass casting. The methods of handling the lures are practically identical. The feathers are cast into likely spots and allowed to sink for a minute or so, or until some six or eight inches beneath the surface, then retrieved with a tantalizing movement. Such a movement causes the feathers or hairs to open and close, fanlike; where the red tag or "tail" is used, disclosing it with every jerk. It is very striking, and from the great pike's point of view, attractive. The particular pattern of fly is not so much a matter of importance, so long as it is bright and commotion-making. I much doubt if, strictly speaking, it is true fly-fishing;

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simply, the fish takes the moving lure to be something edible because it moves. As has been pointed out before, every member of the pike family is dowered with an insatiable appetite, and anything is grist that comes to his mill. Realizing this, the fisherman need not worry about pattern, color, and so forth. All that is required is a bunch of feathers sufficiently conspicuous to attract attention.

In order to render fly-fishing effective, the angler must be perfectly familiar with the water to be whipped. There is little use in casting here and there at random, though that haphazard method may result in a capture once in a while, when a great pike happens to be within sight and unalarmed. When the angler is acquainted with the lurking place of the fish, moves circumspectly and with knowledge, he is as sure of a rise as he can be of anything in the ichthyic world. A great pike *must* attack a bunch of feathers striking the surface of the water with a splash, if unwarned by shadow of boat or rod. A moderately long line should be cast. I know of no fishing where ability to lay a long line is a greater asset. The marge of a weed-bed, especially a tangle of water lilies, is a good spot. Let the fly strike just at the edge and be ready with a taut line to retrieve the instant the fish strikes, or as soon as the fly has sunk to the required depth. With a taut line the chances are that the fish will hook himself; otherwise no wise trout will more quickly and effectively reject the hook.

A deep pool, such as occurs in all great pike-infested water, is a good place for fly-casting early in the morning and again in the evening, though on a bright day the difficulty one experiences in approaching such a

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place unheralded is so great that an angler will be more than likely to frighten a fish to the bottom. More than once, just at the edge of night, I have let my boat down to the head of such a pool by the aid of a long rope, and so circumvented the wary old denizens, to my great joy and sport. I can assure the reader there is an abundance of sport in a twelve-pound great pike at the end of 100 feet of line attached to a reel on a twelve-ounce rod. Take my word for it, you will be required to call upon all your skill and angling knowledge to bring such a fish to gaff. Always my method is to fish out the near water first, covering carefully and without haste all the pool until the far corners are reached. I should emphasize "*without haste*." Perhaps more fish are frightened from our lures by our overeagerness than by any lack of skill on our part, a statement which is true of all angling. The old fable of the hare and the tortoise is very applicable to the angling game. Then, too, the fisherman who has learned how to make haste slowly has discovered the great secret of enjoyment, as well as of success. Where others hurry, I often loiter—and catch fish.

I have had but poor success wading for great pike, for waters containing fish worth while are seldom shallow enough for wading. I fished one lake once where there was what might be termed a ledge of clay some two hundred feet or so from the shore, over the edge of which the water was probably in the neighborhood of forty feet deep. There were no marring weeds of any variety. However, the lake was alive, literally, with medium-sized great pike (from three to six pounds), and standing near the edge of

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the deep water upon the day when I visited the lake, an angler at all expert with rod and reel could take his quota of fish without trouble. I should think one might wade certain rivers, though he would have to proceed with care, lest he get beyond his depth. I would not advise the use of waders of any sort for such an undertaking, and I would insist that the angler be an expert swimmer.

Remains in this chapter but space to urge once more the necessity for strong and dependable landing tools—a good .32 revolver of some sort and a sharp gaff. Lacking the gun, have a good thick club handy. Never attempt to land or gaff a great pike—any pike—until he is thoroughly exhausted; not then unless first stunned with a bullet or blow between the eyes. It is truly surprising what even a six-pound fish will do when you undertake to slip your fingers through his gills, a procedure fraught with considerable danger. A "pike bite" produces a disagreeable sore. Anyway, the fun of the game is playing the fish, so let us prolong the fun. Play every fish to exhaustion always, unless you are actually in need of food.

CHAPTER VIII

Trolling for Great Pike

"Burnished with blue and bright as damask steel,
Behold the Belone of pointed bill;
All fringed with teeth, no greedier fish than they
E'er broke in serried lines our foaming bay.
Soon as the practiced crew this frolic throng
Behold advancing rapidly along,
Adjusting swift a tendon to the line,
They throw, then drag it glistening through the brine."

—*Giannetazcio, Sixteenth Century.*

PERHAPS it is true, as sometimes asserted, that trolling has fallen into disuse these latter days, since the advent of the short rod and multiplying reel, which, if so, only proves that anglers sometimes forego a great pleasure in order to secure a greater. I hold that trolling for great pike is a true and legitimate sport, and to be fully enjoyed should be practiced with short rod and multiplying reel. I have used the hand-line, whirling the heavily weighted spoon about my head, so casting far from the boat and retrieving hand-over-hand. I have used the long "cane pole," with line of equal length, without a reel, so capturing many a lusty great pike. I am not crying down those methods, believing that a sportsman could use them and remain a sportsman, were he the right sort of a man; but long experience has taught me that there is more real enjoyment in playing a fish from the reel, using the regular heavy casting outfit. Furthermore, I honestly believe that so accoutered I can capture two

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fish to the hand-liner's one, and keep it up all day, both being equally well acquainted with the water.

I realize full well that the foregoing lays me open to the charge, the odious charge, of porcine proclivities, but I must trust that those who are familiar with my writings, as well as those who have fished with me, will not be "backward in coming forward" in my defense. I am not, and never have been, a mere fisher for fish. That is why the unjust strictures of men who take five fish to my one always hurt. However, I long ago came to believe with Elbert Hubbard that it is foolish to attempt to explain. Our friends do not need explanations, our enemies would not believe us anyway.

As I have already intimated, for trolling I always employ the short rod, the regular bait-casting rod; not the very light tool, but the so-called "southern bass" type. It is needless to add that the steel is a splendid article for the sport, but by all means purchase as good a one as possible. There are grades in steel, as in every rod material. The reel should be—indeed, must be, for best results—rather large. I like at least 75 yards of line; am better satisfied if I know my reel contains 100. The line should be size F, testing 25 pounds, though if one is trolling where unusually large fish are sometimes connected up with, the fisherman will feel more safe if he be provided with a line testing up to 28 or 30 pounds. However, a new line even smaller than the F will hold a great pike. Never venture the sport with an old line or one that has been much used in casting. It is a very good plan to devote the trolling-line to that sport exclusively, drying carefully and thoroughly after each excursion, and not using it overly long, either.

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In the matter of the trolling spoon I do not know that there is much choice, though naturally I have my prejudices, emphatic ones, too. However, I am charitable and fair-minded enough to admit that angling prejudices, even my own, are not always well founded. I give first place always to the fluted spoon, with the kidney a close second. I have not much use for the new and odd shapes one sometimes sees on the market, though many of them may possess untold virtue. In my experience I have found the two old reliable shapes hooking the most fish, so what will you? Of course it may be possible that I use the favorite spoons more faithfully, and I know from experience there is something in believing in tackle. When an angler "knows" that a certain lure is going to take fish, it generally does. My friend up at the college, the learned professor of psychology, explains just why believing in a bit of tackle reacts, etc., but I have plain old-fashioned faith—and catch fish.

For trolling there is no better and more convenient reel than the level-winder, but unfortunately few are large enough to handle 100 yards of 28-pound test line, though some will spool size F. The fisherman must not attempt to crowd the spool, for it spells disaster every time. A little reflection will explain why. It is the last ten yards of line which is most important; that must be got on the reel or the gaff will never reach the fish, and that ten yards must be spooled after the reel is already comfortably filled. It is easier and better to use a line a few yards shy of the required length than to employ one taxing the capacity of the reel. Lacking the level-winder, any well-made reel, solid and thoroughly dependable, will

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do. The reel is important, for it will be used continuously in trolling as I have in mind.

When the angler may have a boatman, perhaps he is a go-alone variety, in which case he will need a rod holder. The instant a fish strikes—and there will be no need of a bell to warn of the moment—the angler will want the rod in his hands. To have a rod clamped in by a set-screw, as I once saw an arrangement, must be peculiarly vexatious. The wise rodster will not attempt to troll without a boatman or some variety of rod holder. The practice of laying a rod on the bottom of a boat, tip protruding over the stern, is hazardous in the extreme. A large fish, or even a snag, may jerk the whole outfit from the boat before the lone fisherman can drop his oars, much less grasp the rod. Even though a reel have just sufficient pressure of drag to keep the line from paying out, the unexpected may happen at any moment, the line slightly snarl, and the fisherman lose his outfit.

It will not be necessary here to repeat what has been said upon landing tools—gaff, club, revolver, etc.; only, the angler who neglects to plan for the gaffing of the record fish is getting ready to lose it. Always the wise fisherman conducts himself as though he were going to catch the prize-winner every time he shoves his boat out from the landing. To do otherwise is to court disaster. More than once I have lost a good fish because I happened to be without a net or gaff, and thought it would not matter anyway.

Quite recently I left my cottage one morning for a day's trout fishing on a little stream much fished by me. A few rods from the door I bethought me of the net, then went on, remarking to myself: "Shucks!

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What is the use of carrying a net, anyway? I never get big fish on the 'Onion'." So I went on without the net. That day I hooked a German brown, the largest of the season anywhere, and I lost him after exhausting him, simply because I was without a net. Then and there I resolved to carry a net forever and forever. (I have worn out two nets on that stream since that morning, and have failed to hook, even see, another fish as large as the one that got away.)

Now the same thing has happened to me in great pike fishing, and I presume has happened to others. Lacking a gaff or .32 revolver, a good thick club will come in handy. I am sometimes asked about the automatic gaffs one occasionally sees in the tackle stores. Well, I have attempted to use two different makes, and always with anything but flattering results. I have yet to find one that will hold a great pike. The shape of the fish's body is such that the tines of the gaff slip off, in spite of the angler's best efforts. It is not clear to me why it happens. I only know it does.

I well remember a large muskellunge—a muskie is but one of the pikes, you will remember—that I lost in the Chippewa waters of Wisconsin. About half-way down from Glidden I hooked what I think was an unusually large fish for even those waters, hooked and played him until he floated helplessly, belly up, on the surface within reach of the canoe. Then I lunged with the automatic gaff, one of those that is supposed to "go off" when the fish is touched. It sprung, all right, but the tines failed to penetrate the hide of the fish. With a tremendous flop the great fellow shot out. I nearly broke my rod, for I was not

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expecting such a dénouement. Why the gaff did not hold the fish is more than I can understand. The tines would penetrate a block of pine wood to a depth of half an inch or so; yet the round, yielding body of the fish offered the steel no secure hold. The muskellunge did not break away on the first failure, but while I was resetting the gaff he was reviving, and when I brought him near enough for a second attempt, the plunge of the gaff was met with a terrific tackle-destructive surface leap. Mr. Muskie was free, and I filched of a good spoon. Nowadays I prefer a simple old-fashioned gaff, plain and solid, lacking which a good heavy club, built after the shape of a policeman's "billy."

As has been emphasized several times in these pages, the secret of successful gaffing is the complete exhaustion of the fish. I know that great pike are not regarded very highly as fighters, but I must confess that again and again I have been surprised, not only by the fish's resourcefulness, but by his staying qualities as well. More than once I have had a fish hooked on a spoon stay with the game for fifteen minutes. I am sure that other fishermen can narrate incidents where the fish has "come to life" just when the gaff was about to be used, to the chagrin and bitter disappointment of the angler. Perhaps it is not the sight of the boat that awakens the fish to renewed strength, but it looks uncommonly like it to me. Oh, I know certain nature students ask with great scorn, "What can a fish know about a boat?" But to my mind the fact that a fish cannot know a boat as a boat proves nothing. Every fisherman will back me up when I say that no sooner does a great pike, or

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almost any game fish, as for that, near a boat than he is imbued with new energy and fighting strength. If it is not the sight of the boat and its occupants, I would like to know what it is that stirs the fish to unlooked-for activity. Never count a great pike played out until it is.

I am afraid that trolling is not generally understood. I realize how foolish that must sound, but I make the assertion only after years of observation and personal study. Watching men engaged in the sport, again and again I have been impressed with the fact that the average fisherman does not understand the best and most successful methods of pursuing the game. Nine out of ten anglers troll too fast and do not allow sufficient line. This was brought home to me a number of years ago, the incident serving as a starting point for my study.

I was fishing, trolling, on a small lake with a companion. He used a short line, and I a comparatively long one, from 150 to 200 feet. I caught exactly three fish to his one. That convinced me as to the efficacy of a long line. The second point I noticed, which caused me to do considerable thinking, was the fact that every time we "came about" I would get a strike or hook a fish. Finally I came to the conclusion that the slowing up of the spoon in turning around gave the great pike a better chance to grasp the lure. My companion laughed at my "notions," but when it came my turn to row I gradually slowed up, and, lo, we both got strikes. The seed was sown. I began my investigations. Now I can say without fear of successful contradiction that what we often call a "fishless water," or a water in which great pike are "off their

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feed," will prove remunerative if we but troll slow. Troll slow, just as slow as you can, and keep the spoon above the weeds and free of the bottom.

When the angler uses 100 feet of line or more, very little extra weight will be needed; the weight of the line and lure will be sufficient. The reader can readily see that when the boat slows up the lure is bound to sink, too deeply if much weight in the way of "sinkers" is added. Of course the character of the water fished must be taken into consideration. When it is snaggy or very weedy, one cannot handle so long a line. But always use as long a line as possible, so the hook will be well behind the boat and its disturbance.

Which brings me to another matter that has been discussed in a preceding chapter—the shyness of fish. The better I become acquainted with great pike, the more certain I am that they are more shy than most anglers think them. The shadow of a boat is sufficient to make them suspicious, and the splash of an oar will send them to shelter. What fisherman has not seen a great pike follow a lure up to the boat and then turn and glide away, a ghostly specter, without striking? Shy. Now it is a safe bet that if the fisherman were to stand off from the weed-bed or lair of the fish and cast in, or pass slowly by, the lure 150 or 200 feet behind the boat, the fish would strike, and strike hard. I have proven it in numberless cases. As I have said several times in this work already, I am learning to treat all members of the pike family as though they were credited with being as shy as brook trout on a bright day. The net results have been truly surprising. I can go out alone where the other fellows say there are no fish and take a mess almost any day.

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The very best trolling ground is in the deep water along the edges of weed-beds, though of course the fisherman must have a care lest he hook a weed. Hooking weeds is not disastrous, though mighty unpleasant when upward of 100 feet of line is dragging behind the boat. The next best place is over submerged weeds, though that variety of trolling is to be attempted only with much prayer and patience. Always the hooks will become entangled with the up-rearing weeds, for not always are the tops of submerged weeds of an even height. Usually the weed will break and so the hook be freed, though cumbered with a tangle of cerements that must be removed. But if the weed does not break, there should be sufficient line upon the reel spool to obviate disaster. It is never the part of wisdom to use up the last ten yards of line, no matter what the temptation to let out more. One never knows what may happen and when. Usually accidents happen when the fisherman is unprepared or, rather, when he *has* prepared for them. Next to the weedy places I think I would seek out the inlet or outlet, or deep water just off bars, where minnows are found. There is little use in trolling in deep water, unless there is especial attraction for great pike— weeds, food, etc. The wise angler attempts at least to reason out the whys and wherefores. The longer I angle, the more thought I give to the subject, the more thoroughly convinced I am that fish use more "reason" than most of us give them credit for. I am certain that there is some good "fish-reason" why a red-and-white rag is more attractive to great pike than an all red or all white rag. He who knows the most answers to the whys of angling catches the most fish.

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There are times when a baited spoon is the successful lure. I presume a consistent purist would not use the two in combination, one being live-bait fishing and the other trolling. Perhaps the practice is violating the highest ethics of sport—as to that I will not attempt to say. Only it is a good idea to resort to a frog-baited spoon, when other methods of trolling fail. I tried out the following on a certain lake quite recently and several times. Made a circuit of the fish-grounds with an unbaited spoon, then with one to which a frog was attached, followed by a frog alone. Very seldom was the unbaited spoon struck, never the simple frog; often great pike took the two in combination. "Why?" The answer is not easy. Perhaps the whirling spoon attracted the water-wolf's attention, in the first place, and, finding the frog, he struck. I only know that whenever I tried out the method on my "laboratory lake," it won great pike. Of course it is a "froggy lake"—much grass and many weed-beds, where a cast live frog is a splendid lure late evening and early morning. As I think I said in the chapter on live-bait fishing, I doubt the value of frogs in water uninhabited by them.

As there are frog harnesses and minnow hooks for casting, so these contrivances can be utilized for bait trolling with little difficulty. It is a good plan to wire the frog or minnow to the treble of the spoon, if one is unprovided with some sort of harness, or safety-pin arrangement. I have had little success with minnow-baited trolling hooks, however. A streamer of red-and-white strips of cloth attached to the hooks sometimes serves to attract the fish's attention. There are days, too, when the buck-tail, mentioned in the chap-

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ter on fly-fishing, is a good trolling lure, though it simply travels through the water and makes no commotion whatever.

Trolling is peculiarly a lake sport; for, unless the river be so sluggish as to be hardly worthy the name of river, the current will render boat-trolling exceedingly difficult. However, there are rivers sluggish enough to make trolling upstream feasible. Downstream is more difficult, as the spoon must travel very fast indeed to overcome the influence of the current. Often there are wide bends and deep eddies in even a comparatively rapid river, where trolling can be resorted to with good results. Never pass a grassy slough or bayou opening off from a river. Such spots are almost certain to be the home of large great pike. I have already mentioned the sloughs of Lake Superior as pike-full places.

There is a method of fishing small streams with trolling spoons that I have found very attractive. Cast out and allow the current to carry the spoon down. Begin to reel when the spoon is opposite your position, so as to bring the spoon back quartering with the current. However, as a rule, it is in the eddies and backwaters that the angler must look for his fish, for great pike are not swift-water lovers. Large great pike will preempt a deep pool and hold it against all intruders until caught. I have hooked the same fish—I am morally certain it was the same great pike—three times before getting the hook to hold. One reason why I thought but one fish inhabited the pool was because, after I succeeded in securing the big great pike, I took no more from that spot for some time—three weeks, if I remember correctly.



SPOONS

1. Salt-water rig, but good for great pike and 'lunge.
2. Knowls' "Automatic Striker."
3. "Skinner fluted."
4. "Slim Eli."
- 5 and 6. South Bend "Muskie Spoons."

A COMPACT CASTING OUTFIT

This case will contain the rods shown, revolver, gaff, three reels, and a generous supply of lures, etc.

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Returning to lake fishing. I well remember a little Wisconsin lake, surrounded by jack-pine crowned hills and bleak, uncultivated and uncultivable sand plains, which was actually a great pike paradise. One side of the lake was marshy, while the other was fringed by a mass of water lilies. I make no mention of the "ends," for the lake was so narrow that the "ends" were but fingers of water. Where the lake emptied into another and larger body of water were a forest of cat-tails and a field of sawgrass. Early one morning, skirting those cat-tails, my spoon spinning all of 130 feet behind the boat, I undertook to swing around without taking in any line. Suddenly the bowing line snapped taut, and I naturally supposed that I was hooked to one of the waving cat-tails. Dropping my oars in clattering disgust, disregarding of fish, I began to reel. Imagine my astonishment and joy, when a big granddad great pike lumbered to the surface with a great splashing and aqueous racket. Setting the drag on the reel, I replaced the rod in the holder, grabbed the oars, and urged that boat out into the lake. So interested did I become in the battle, once I was in the center of the water, that I paid little attention to the boat, in due time finding my fish safe in the margining haven of reeds. And yet everything held. I coaxed the fish out, with a mass of weeds and rushes fast to its head, and finally vanquished and gaffed him. At the tent he tipped the scales at two ounces over eight pounds. Not a big fish, truly, but one that had given me unlimited sport.

That is one of the attractivities of great pike trolling. The angler can find it almost anywhere, and the outfit required, aside from the boat, is neither elaborate nor

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expensive. That little lake just mentioned, which must be nameless here, was a favorite spot of ours for eight years. We could drive to it in a few hours, and so poor was the land that, though surrounded by distant farms, we were absolutely alone, away from folks, yet not too distant from a little city. Since leaving that section of the country, I have often wondered if the little lake remains, as of old, as little fished and as full of fish. I wonder if the farmers have conquered the sand, cleared away the jack pine, and if fields of rye now wave where once there was nothing but ferns? If not, and I ever become wealthy, I think I should like to purchase the lake and the surrounding hills for sweet memories' sake. It was there my only child caught her first fish, spent many happy vacation days of childhood. There used to be some big great pike in that water, too.

CHAPTER IX

Ice-Fishing for Great Pike

"The fishermen sit by their camp fire of rotten pine wood, so wet and chilly that even smoke in their eyes is a kind of comfort. There they sit, ever and anon scanning their reels to see if they have fallen, and, if not catching any fish, still getting what they went for, though they may not be aware of it, i. e., a wilder experience than the town affords."—*Thoreau's Journal*.

THERE is no fresh-water game fish which lends itself more admirably to the requirements of the winter fisherman than do great pike and pickerel, though of course the former is the preferred fish, because of larger size and greater toothsome-ness. I presume any fish that will take live bait in summer can be caught in winter, provided the eager angler knows where to look for them. This does not apply to the black bass in the North, for they become semi-dormant with the arrival of cold weather, though I once took a large-mouth in Wisconsin in January when fishing through the ice for great pike. Probably more anglers seek the ubiquitous perch and unimportant members of the sunfish family than go in quest of the larger pikes, thinking no doubt that the former are more readily taken through the ice in midwinter. I have no charge to bring against the sunfish and perch. Indeed I consider the latter the most palatable fish—fresh-water fish—save the aristocratic speckled trout. But that is not saying that a six-pound great pike is to be treated with contempt by the epicure or passed

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lightly by the lover of the red-blooded sport of ice-fishing.

The tackle required for winter fishing is neither elaborate nor expensive. While I have known men to take rod and reel, with the thought of playing the capture, a little reflection should warn one that the sharp edges of the ice will soon work havoc with the best of lines. I do not imagine that it would be a very pleasant experience to have a six- or eight-pound fish escape, trailing ten or fifteen feet of line. Then, too, the knowledge that the fish was at liberty so handicapped would not be conducive to happy dreams. Somehow one thinks of the winter life of northern fish more sympathetically than he does of their summer existence, though undoubtedly they are just as "happy" in their ice-locked home as they are when the warm summer winds roughen the surface of the water. Lest we find ourselves discussing that age-old question as to whether or not fish suffer, we will return promptly to the subject at hand—winter great pike fishing.

The "tip-up" is familiar to every fisherman, and there is no better contrivance for small fish, such as perch, sunfish, and pickerel; but for the larger and more combative great pike, a stronger outfit is required, something that will give them line when needed. As winter fishing is indulged in when the water is freezing and oftentimes the set line is left to care for itself for hours at a stretch, it follows that the spare line must be far enough below the surface of the water to be beyond the influence of the frost. One of the most satisfactory arrangements ever employed by me was a simple loop, made by passing the line around the four fingers of the left hand until sufficient

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spare line was "bunched." Three or four turns were made about the middle of the skein and the end of the line passed under the wrapping. (See the illustration.) When a fish seized the bait, he would pull out the loop and the skein would automatically fall apart. The scheme is a good one for a heavy set line.

If the fisherman plans upon watching his lines, then he may use a "tip-up," or even a twig thrust into the surface of the ice or snow. But always the line should be attached to a stick midway between either end, and long enough so that, should an obstreperous great pike swallow the bait and start for the lower end of the lake, he will find it impossible to take the whole outfit with him. Not simply a hunger for baked great pike, but common humanity will seek to prevent the escape of a well-hooked fish with an outfit.

The line should be rather heavy. The old-fashioned trolling or chalk line is ideal, being strong and comparatively cheap. There is no necessity for expensive braided silk when it comes to set lines. Cheap cotton will serve as well or better. The hook must be heavy and well made, say, size 7-0 or 8-0 ringed Kirby, with a wire gimp or leader, to which are attached one or two swivels. (The "fussy" fisherman will gimp his own hooks.) A rather heavy sinker, No. 6 or 7, will be required, in order to get the line out quickly. Where there is much current, two sinkers may be required and used. So much for the tackle. Now for the bait.

I have experimented quite at length in the matter of baits, and have come to the conclusion that there is just one best bait for winter use—minnows, shiner minnows. A strip of pork, cut long and thin, is good for an over-night bait when needs must, but a live

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minnow is more attractive. If one is going to watch the hook, the minnow can be hooked through the body just below the backbone or from the throat up through the head. Where the line is to be left set for any great length of time, I would advise thrusting the hook into the mouth, out through the gills, and back through the body. Some set-line fishermen even wire on the minnow, using very fine spun steel wire. However, I have never resorted to the practice, feeling that the previous method described works well enough.

At first thought the reader might imagine that the securing of minnows in midwinter would be something of a problem, though they are easily caught by those who know where to look for them. Always they can be taken from open creeks with a dip-net, and spring-fed creeks remain unfrozen even in the coldest of winter weather. Minnows congregate—or, should I say "school"?—where creeks enter a body of water. In midwinter, too, those small members of the fish family gather in great schools of countless thousands, crowding and pushing one another close up inshore. Perhaps they are perishing for want of air; at any rate, that is the usual explanation. I only know that, if the bait seeker cut a hole in the ice, they will literally boil out upon the surface. The taking of a barrel-full of shiner minnows is the work of but a few minutes, a scoop-shovel serving as satisfactorily as a dip-net. Many a fisherman living near a shiner lake lays in a supply of summer live bait long before the spring break-up. There is little difficulty in securing the required minnows, if the winter fisherman knows where to look for them. Some men of my acquaintance, town dwellers, always keep a barrel of minnows in



AN ICE OUTFIT FOR GREAT PINE

1. Chain to project through the ice so that line can not be frozen or cut by swimming.
2. Skein of spare line which is left hanging below the freezing line, under hook (a) slipped under wrapping which loosens at first pull of fish.
3. Sinkers.
4. Swivels.
5. Long wire leader.
6. Special bait hook.

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their basements, summer and winter, so as to be prepared for fishing whenever the urge is strong upon them.

While undoubtedly a live minnow is the most attractive, a dead one may be used, provided the fisherman is willing to stand over the hole and "bob"-jerk the line up and down. I have found that such a movement, even when using live bait, is apt to attract great pike from a distance. Three set hooks not over twenty feet apart, in a triangle, were baited with live shiner minnows, and the one I bobbed would take fish, while the other two invited great pike in vain. It seemed to make no difference which hook I manipulated, the one I kept in motion attracted the "fresh-water wolves." I have noticed the same thing when ice-fishing for perch; therefore I assert that, all else equal, it is the hook that is kept in motion which takes the fish. And why not? Does not a moving minnow attract more attention than a stationary one? Which is the more attractive in summertime? Upon the answer to the foregoing questions will hinge the action of the eager winter great pike fisher.

As to the locality for ice-fishing for great pike, all will depend upon where the fish "hang out" in wintertime. By and large, a water which affords good summer fishing should also supply winter sport. As has been pointed out again and again in earlier chapters of this work, members of the pike family do not hold a roving commission, but linger in a given locality. About the only thing that will impel any pike to emigrate is dearth of food. Let me add here that once upon a time all the pike fraternity of a certain Wisconsin lake moved out along toward the last of

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February. The winter had been an exceptionally cold one, with little snow, and ice formed to the depth of two feet or so. Perhaps the fish were "smothering." I know that minnows were very numerous in the water. At any rate, the pickerel and great pike, small and large, moved out in a body. I stood on the banks of the outlet, a small creek, and watched the great fish slip by, fish such as one dreams of by the campfire or hears splash along about eleven o'clock of a hot July night. Needless to add, the pike fishing in that lake was but indifferent for several seasons after the great exodus. But, as was said a moment ago, aside from the procreative urge, lack of food is ordinarily the only reason why pike ever move, bag and baggage.

Out in the center of the lake is not apt to prove a good place for cutting holes. Better far begin operations along the shore just where the water deepens or along the edges of weed-beds, both good locations in summertime. Sometimes near the outlet or inlet there will be a deep channel. Both are good places, for minnows congregate there, and where minnows foregather there look for their arch enemies, the great pike. One must, should, be acquainted with the lake or river and the lurking places of great pike, an acquaintanceship which can be consummated only in summertime, for then and then only can depth and conformation be studied. Sometimes a reef out in the center of the water will supply a good fishing place, though at the edge where the water sharply deepens will be more apt to give the fisherman a record-breaking

Which leads me to say that now and then the fine fisher who braves the winter cold is presented

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with such a fish as seldom comes to the caster's lures or bait-fisher's waiting hook. That there are bigger fish in the lake than the angler has ever taken, is as a rule, I believe, something other than fiction.

As the reader has undoubtedly already discovered, the writer, if not an expert ice fisherman, is an enthusiastic devotee of the sport. One reason winter fishing appeals to me is because the outfit is simple and there is little "getting ready" necessary. It is the very antithesis of ordinary angling where the outfit is as elaborate as the pocketbook of the fisherman will allow. The ice fisherman can carry his whole paraphernalia in his great-coat pocket; that is, unless the ax be considered a part of the outfit. However, there are certain supplemental articles which, while they are not considered absolutely necessary, are very convenient to say the least. An ice-chisel is handy to ream out the hole after the ax-blade has struck through into the water. Then, too, the coffee pail and fry-pan should never be left at home; for I know of no place where a cup of hot coffee and a heaping platter of fried great pike possess greater value or more comforting power. Every ice fisherman will understand when I say that it is more disastrous to forget the coffee pail than to forget hooks and lines.

I remember one warm March morning—it was warm *on shore*—I, in company with one of the best and truest sportsmen, who fills an important place in the world's scheme of things, set out to capture great pike through the ice. Our destination was a slough or side-channel opening off from a large body of water. Many a monster fish had fallen to my rod there in the good old summertime, so why not fish through the ice?

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Our outfit was the simple one mentioned in the first of this chapter—coiled lines, weighted with two sinkers and strong, well-made hooks. A small pail of shiner minnows provided the needful bait. The lunch occupied more place than the outfit.

Before I ask you to step with me out upon the ice, I must pause to pay tribute to the winter shores, so different from those of midsummer, yet in a way no less attractive. The transforming miracle of draping snow is something to wonder at and exclaim over. A high bank, with its overhanging cornice of wind-blown snow grotesquely gargoyled, rivaled the finished work of Old World sculptors. A hideous black stump, mute reminder of a vanished forest, had become a pulpit of wonder and beauty, covered with an altar-cloth of immaculate loveliness. It is easy for the ice fisherman to "see things," if he visit the fishing ground after a fall of clinging, wet snow.

I cut the first hole for two reasons: That I might warm my sluggish blood, and also demonstrate to my companion that there is more to cutting a hole in the ice than first appears. Always in magazines you see pictures of round holes, the idea being to cut a trench around a solid block of ice and lift out the block or core intact. But unfortunately that block usually breaks into a thousand pieces long before the chopper works his painful way through eighteen inches or more of solid ice. The plan might work if the ice were under a foot thick; not otherwise, unless the hole were made too large for fishing. No fancy round hole was my goal. I simply cut a long gash in the ice sixteen or so inches wide and three or four feet long. No barked fingers for me by jamming them against the sharp

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edges of the hole. As soon as the bit of my ax struck through into water, I took an ice-chisel and rimmed out the bottom of the hole. Quickly fastening a minnow to the hook of an already rigged line, I lowered it some fifteen feet beneath the surface and left it to do the fishing. Of course, the end of the line was securely tied to a stick sufficiently long to prevent the whole outfit being carried away.

I gave the ax and chisel over into the hands of my companion, and busied myself gathering a heap of firewood—logs, stumps, and chunks, some of which were so large that I was compelled to roll them out upon the ice. A good fire is an important adjunct to ice-fishing, for, as I have already intimated, even a warm land day is apt to seem exceedingly frigid out upon a wind-swept lake. In fact, I do not remember a real *warm* day on the ice, and I have been out when the surface was well a-slush, too. When my fire was going in good shape, I returned to my friend and found that he had finished his first hole and was busily engaged upon the second. Without paying any attention to the first line set, I turned to and helped. When we had cut six holes and got out the sets, we concluded that we had enough lines and returned to the fire to warm up, or rather, unfreeze and dry out, the splashing of the water having wet our mittens disagreeably. The wise winter fisherman carries at least one extra pair.

It had not been our purpose to bob for great pike, simply to set lines and wait for the fish to come along; but my friend could not keep away from his holes. Consequently, while manipulating the stick attached to the last line set, he attracted and hooked a fish. Unfortunately for him, he did not give the fish sufficient

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time to swallow the bait, or perhaps it just happened to be insecurely hooked. At any rate, just as he brought his capture to the surface it gave a convulsive flop and fell back into the hole. My companion very foolishly plunged his whole arm into the water in an ineffectual attempt to grasp the puzzled fish, but failed to gain a secure hold—a very difficult thing to do—before the great pike had found the opening into the water below. My friend said some things that tempered the wind to the ice fisherman, all right.

Now I had unbounded faith in the first hole cut, for no good reason under the sun, it is true. But whenever did an angler have a reason for the faith that is in him, I should like to know? I did not pet nor baby it, simply left it to itself, which is sometimes the wisest plan. At my second visit I found the skein of reserve line pulled out and the minnow gone. Without saying anything—for language was utterly inadequate—I baited up, using the largest minnow in the pail. I expected great things of that set. No, I did not spit on the hook.

My companion won first blood by securing a lively two-pound fish, which put up quite a fight, but was finally drawn out upon the ice to kick and flop its life away. It seemed to me that the lucky angler was needlessly arrogant and heady over his bit of luck. You see, I could not understand why he, a comparative greenhorn, should catch the first fish, when I, an old hand, caught nothing, like the apostles of old, after toiling all night. Well, Luck, especially Fisherman's Luck, has always been a perverse, unreasoning jade, any way, visiting whomsoever she chooses without rhyme or reason. Just to see how patient I could be

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under affliction, Fate gave the second fish to my chum, and then a third, and a good one, too, a pike that tipped the scales at seven pounds. I emulated Job (*outside*) and got dinner, frying my friend's first fish. So I had my revenge, and revenge is sweet. So was the great pike, fried in bacon drippings. Fried bacon and great pike, boiled potatoes, bread and butter, coffee, and, to top off with, a quarter-section of old-fashioned back-country mince pie, with great fat raisins to pop in one's mouth! Reader, did you never toast a slice of thick mince pie on a forked stick, cut to fit the pie? "No?" Well, you certainly have got something to live for.

After lunch my luck turned, and I secured two good fish in short order; indeed, got both on while we were eating. My companion secured the next fish, his fourth, making six in all. I was satisfied, for six fish is indeed a good catch for the winter angler. Many a time have I secured less. My pet set angled away in vain, though my faith in it was not disturbed in the least. I just *knew* it would win out if given time enough. I vowed I would not look at it, "just for luck," until we were ready to leave the ice. We talked and visited by the fire, speculating upon the coming open season, which was drawing nearer rapidly, discussed the war and religion, the outdoor press, and ancient literature, with that catholicity of taste so characteristic of all anglers from Izaak Walton down. Ever and anon we would examine our sets, though my first was approached by neither. My friend secured another fish along toward four o'clock, and his pride and lordliness were greatly increased thereby. Strange, how a little bit of luck will set up some people.

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At four-thirty we decided to pull up and began taking in our lines. One by one we folded them away, and at last I approached the first line set, remarking with an assumption of certainty which I was far from feeling, "Now I will show you a real great pike." I bent over the hole. The line was pulled off to one side and was stretched down taut as a fiddlestring. Even the thick branch to which the end of the line was fastened was bending with the strain. I took the line in my hand gingerly and pulled gently. A dead weight. I exerted more strength. Something down below was galvanized into sudden activity, and the line was pulled through my fingers. Glad was I that the line was new and strong, as well as securely tied to a green willow as thick through as my wrist.

I have fought some worthy fish in my time both with fly-rod and casting-stick, and there have been times when I trembled for the integrity of my tackle; times when I found it hard to breathe from sheer excitement; but I must confess to the reader here that, for heart-rending anxiety and smothering excitement, those long moments out there on the glistening ice, clinging to that stinging, burning-chalk line, has them all beaten to a frazzle. The fish was well spent when I first undertook to lift the set. He might have been playing himself for three hours; otherwise I am certain something would have parted. My companion danced around the hole, shouting advice and abjurations. To the first I paid no attention; to the second I mentally responded "Amen!" Fortunately there came an instant when the fish's nose was pointed into the hole. I pulled at the "psychological instant," and the great pike shot out upon the ice. Such a great pike! Such a

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great pike! It weighed—figures will not suffice; I must write it out in words—just *fifteen pounds and seven ounces*.

I stood for long minutes gazing down upon the monster, "lost in wonder and amaze," the largest great pike I had ever heard of being taken through the ice, and one of THE large fish of my fishing experience. Large fish are always more a matter of luck than skill, though usually it is the veriest dub that secures the monster, where the expert catches minnows. Suddenly I was brought back to earth by hearing my friend meanly remark: "Well, you needn't be so darn cocky about it. Other fellows undoubtedly have caught larger great pike." Of course, I do not believe that I was half as set up over my great good fortune as was he over a much smaller fish earlier in the day. Anyway, *I* had good reason for being elated.

As we tramped along toward home, the big fish swinging from a pole carried on our shoulders, my companion broke a long silence with, "Say, O. W., what would you have done had this fish been too large to pull through the hole?" To the victor all things are possible, so I answered easily, "Oh, I would have drawn him out *long!*"

My only excuse for appending the above narrative to this chapter is the one all-sufficient reason—"It is not all of fishing to fish." There are times when we must stop talking tackle and methods and just fish.

CHAPTER X

Muskellunge and Artificial Lures

"A long, slim, strong, and swift fish, in every way fitted to the life it leads, that of a dauntless marauder."

IN beginning a discussion of muskellunge fishing, let me say that I am well aware that I must step upon some angling brother's ichthyic corns before I have finished. However, I am not going out of my way to invite criticism or excite the anger of my compatriots of the rod and pen. I can but set down the result of my own experience. Indeed, if we were all agreed, there would be no need for the "Book of the Pike." Let me urge the reader to turn back to Chapters II and III and reread them carefully, especially Chapter III, for such a course will prepare him somewhat for what I am about to say upon muskellunge fishing, whether with artificial lures or live bait.

At the very outset let us disabuse our minds of the notion that a muskellunge is one whit more gamy than a great pike of the same size, in like environment and water. That an eight-pound muskellunge, say, is possessed of greater strength or more resourcefulness than an eight-pound great pike, is an angling superstition pure and simple. I have tried out both under varying waters and conditions, and am ready to stand back of the assertion. I had as soon angle for great pike as muskellunge. Inch for inch and pound for pound, one is as gamy as the other.

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In habits, unless the muskellunge is more inclined to solitude than the great pike, there is little difference. In a state of nature, fortunately for the fish, pickerel and great pike spawn in March, while the muskellunge do not seek the overflowed marshes and shallow grassy streams until May. Hence the spawn of the muskellunge is exposed, not only to the ravages of young pickerel, but also to the avid appetite of mudhens, ducks, turtles, frogs, etc. I think it is Dr. Henshall who asserts that comparatively few of the muskellunge fry survive. As we know that every pound of muskellunge represents several hundredweight of other fish, we can understand the economy of nature. However, when we add to natural enemies of muskellunge the ardent angler, we can well rejoice that at least two states have seriously taken up artificial propagation of the fish. I doubt the wisdom of planting muskellunge and great pike in waters adapted to other game fish; for while bass and pike do coexist in the same waters at times, the indiscriminate planting of the former is to be frowned upon.

I must confess that the weight of muskellunge, as given by Jordan and Evermann in "American Food and Game Fishes," "100 pounds or more," appears to me almost fabulous. Even eighty pounds savors of the tales of Munchausen these days, whatever may have been the fish's weight in days long gone by. Mr. Tarlton Bean, in a report of the New York State Fish Commission, records the taking of fish ranging from forty to fifty pounds, but that was twenty years and more ago. At Minoqua, where the Wisconsin muskellunge hatchery is located, they have the record of one forty-pound fish, but that specimen, too, was

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taken something like fifteen or twenty years ago. Anyone who has followed the records as published in the *Field and Stream* contests can but conclude that a thirty-pound muskellunge may be considered as a large fish. The average angler who takes a twenty-pound muskellunge is to be congratulated. Now we are down where the average angler does his fishing. I am under the impression that a fish under ten pounds is more active than one over, allowing for individuality. Of course, added weight tests tackle, but mere avoirdupois is not gameness. A man of 214 pounds will not prove as good a sprinter as will one of 140, though the former will require a stronger hammock than the latter. Every angler desires to take a forty-pound muskellunge. I hope to have such an one mounted and hung above my fireplace. Once upon a time I took an eighteen-pound fish, and that was a red-letter day in my ichthyic experiences. Strange, is it not, the man who haunts a good muskellunge water a season through must be content with an eighteen-pound 'lunge, while a drygoods clerk from Chicago, who had hardly seen a rod and reel before coming to the lake, should take a forty-pounder the first morning?

I have already discussed the three species of muskellunge, though I am not willing to give them specific rank, thinking them less than sub-species. (See Chapter III.) In order to refresh your minds, a brief recapitulation. There is, first of all, the Great Lakes fish and the St. Lawrence fish, body grayish-silver, the ground color flecked with irregular blackish spots (*Esox masquinongy*); followed by the fish of the Ohio drainage, including a few New York and Pennsylvania lakes, in which the ground color is overcast with

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darker cross-bars which separate into diffuse spots (*Esox ohiensis*); the fish of the Wisconsin and Minnesota lakes and rivers, with bodies unspotted or at most with indistinct dark cross-shades (*Esox immaculatus*). So, whether the angler fish in the muskellunge districts of Wisconsin and Minnesota, take fish from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, or must needs be content with an *Esox* from the Ohio watershed, he is taking muskellunge, if the proper squamation appear upon cheek and gill-cover. Scientifically speaking, those fortunate anglers who dwell in the Badger or Gopher States have no real right to the airs they sometimes assume. Hold that one fact of cheek and gill-cover scaling in mind, and let the colorists rave and quarrel among themselves. A man's connection with the aristocracy, nor yet his fighting ability, depends not upon whether or no dame Nature has embellished his cheeks with freckles.

Undoubtedly, more muskellunge have been taken at the end of a hand-line trailed behind a boat than by any other method, which, however, is not saying that such is the best and most enjoyable way of taking them. Even when trolling, I always use and advocate a rod and reel. The hand-line on fresh water should be relegated to the museum cabinet, along with the spear and jack. Not that the hand-line is essentially unsportsmanlike, but because there is infinitely more pleasure in handling lures with the short rod and multiplying reel. Then, too, unless the tackle be handled with skill and circumspection, the quarry is bound to escape. I hold that the angler acquainted with the habits of muskellunge can take more fish with rod, reel, and artificial lures handled exactly as

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the tackle is handled in bass fishing. That he must be more than a novice with the outfit, is accepted without argument. The rodster must be able to cast 100 feet—150 would be better—with accuracy, for the fish he seeks is exceedingly shy, as well as solitary in habits.

It is not the part of wisdom to subject a light bass casting rod to the severe work required of muskellunge tackle. A heavy bass split-bamboo is all right in the hands of an understanding angler, while a high-grade Bristol steel is almost ideal. By no means use a cheap, therefore poorly constructed, steel rod for the work. I do not advocate an overly large line, such as is affected by some. One testing twenty-two pounds will play any muskellunge that ever lorded it over the smaller denizens of northern lakes and rivers, *provided* the angler possesses skill and understanding; if not, let him invest in a heavier line, if necessary up to the "forty-pound-test-muskellunge." Personally, I can see no need for the heavy lines in the hands of the man who is willing and able to play his fish to the point of the gaff. The reel should be one of the level-winding variety, sufficiently large to accommodate 200 feet of size G line. Some fishermen use the self-thumbng reel, claiming that by so doing they are able to give their whole attention to playing the fish. Well, as for me, I prefer to thumb my reel myself, and I believe that I make a better fist of the job than does any mechanism yet produced. However, I am not saying that the self-thumbers are not all their makers claim for them; they are, and perfectly all right for the man who likes them. (See discussion of this whole matter in the author's "Casting Tackle and Methods.")

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However, as emphasized a moment ago, the level-winding attachment is a great aid, especially so since it can be secured so arranged that it drops down out of the way in casting, if the angler thinks the line-guide a hindrance. It is unnecessary to add that the reel for muskellunge fishing must be well made, of the very best material, for it may be called upon to endure such grief as falls to the lot of the salt-water winch only.

Once upon a time I wrote a certain rod manufacturer—to be more specific I dare not for obvious reasons—asking him to forward me a good, well-made quadruple multiplying reel adapted to muskellunge angling. In return I received a letter stating that a quadruple was not adapted to the sport, and that he was sending a double multiplier, 200 yards capacity. I have that reel yet, a *salt-water winch*, and it will contain over 300 yards of 23-pound test line. But that took place something like fifteen years or so ago, when I first began a serious study of the pike family and pike tackle. Undoubtedly that same manufacturer to-day would recommend an eighty-yard quadruple reel. The man who can not successfully fight a muskellunge with an eighty-yard reel has something to learn and something to experience.

There is a great variety of artificial lures—"plugs"—running the whole gamut of form and color, built expressly for the muskellunge fisherman, and they are good lures, every one. My only criticism of the modern muskellunge lure is that it is far too heavy for easy or expert handling. Looking over my large but, I presume, incomplete collection, I find many lures from seven to ten inches long, measuring from tip to tip.

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Those lures weigh all the way from one and one-half ounces for the lightest, to three ounces for the heaviest. I have yet to see the five-ounce split-bamboo rod capable of standing up under the strain of casting a three-ounce lure. I would give the maximum casting weight of a lure as at one and one-half ounces, and that is heavy for easy casting. I had rather that a lure weighed an ounce, or a fraction either way. I am thinking of casting, the reader will understand. Undoubtedly there is a certain attractiveness to an eight- or ten-inch lure from the muskellunge's point of view, but I can handle the smaller lures so much more effectively as to offset the attractiveness of the larger "plug." I always think of my rods, for I love them.

If the lure be extraordinarily well made, hooks hand forged, attached to a wire running through the body or to the hooks upon the other side—never to a simple screw driven into the soft wood of the body—there should be no danger of a break. I have had hooks fractured by the fierce onslaught of an overly large great pike or muskellunge, but always because the hooks were poorly made. My largest muskellunge was taken on an ordinary bass plug weighing considerably less than an ounce. The lure should always be provided with an eight- or ten-inch wire leader or gimp. Nothing but the best of wire should be used. Then let the fish "strike over," if he so desires. The rodster can smile.

In muskellunge fishing—in all pike fishing, as for that—the angler must think of landing his quarry e'en before he makes the initial cast. Some wise one once averred, "It is too late to repent after the devil comes;" so it is too late to wish for a good gaff, re-

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volver, or even Teddy Roosevelt's "big stick," when the fish lies exhausted alongside the boat. The relative importance of the three landing tools is indicated by their order. Personally, I always carry a .32 revolver in my pike-kit, for a pellet of lead placed between the evil eyes of a muskellunge has a very quieting effect. After such treatment the gaffing is easy, even unnecessary. To prick a fish before he is thoroughly exhausted, is to lose him nine times out of ten. Eschew all patent automatic grab-'em-quick gaffs. Whatever their value for other fish, for muskellunge they are worse than useless. I lost my first record fish through trying to grab him with one of those spring contrivances.

As the muskellunge is a solitude-loving fish, somewhat given to lording it over the smaller denizens of the marshy, weedy margins of deep water, it behooves the circumspect angler to court an intimate acquaintanceship with any given water before he seriously sets to work with rod and reel. Granted that the first cast of a salad tyro, made at random on a new water, may result in a fish (we have all known of its happening), yet it proves nothing. Lightning *may* strike the very tree beneath whose friendly branches we take refuge from a sudden thundershower. Surely I need not urge my readers to believe with me that there is something more than luck and chance in successful angling. The muskellunge is not a wide roamer so long as he can find sufficient food to fill his capacious maw. He has his lair and favorite hunting ground, as much as any ravenous beast of the forest primeval. The wise fisherman acquaints himself with first-hand information. I actually think that an expert handler

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of artificial lures would catch more fish on a three-day muskellunge trip, if he would spend the first two studying the water to be cast over without even wetting a line. Perhaps that is an exaggeration; however, this is the point I would emphasize: In raising fish, a knowledge of the water is more important than good tackle. Good tackle is an accessory after the fact. A fine rod, expensive reel, and finished lure are impotent unless the handler knows the habits of the muskellunge and is comparatively well acquainted with the water to be fished.

I had a fishing acquaintance with a muskellunge of Eagle Lake, Wisconsin, some summers ago, and though he rose to my lures and live bait a number of times, and I hooked him once, always he escaped. Wise old Gray-sides! The careless handling of a paddle, the scraping of a boot upon the floor of the boat, even a flash from the reel was sufficient to awaken his suspicions. Frightened, he never stampeded, as does the trout; rather, *faded away*. That is an apt description. More than once I saw him lying near the surface, inert, motionless; then, presto, without movement or motion apparently, he was gone. But a basking—"sleeping"—muskellunge seldom if ever strikes. Well do I remember old "Gray-sides' " lair—the top of an upturned tree, reaching out from the shore to the very edge of deep water. The shore itself was bordered with a mat of lily leaves, thick and impenetrable. Just off the lily bed, the water suddenly deepened to twenty or thirty feet. Any muskellunge fisherman will recognize it at once for an ideal "muskie hole." Ah, "Gray-sides" was heavy, wise, and old—too old and wise and heavy for me.

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Acquainted with the water, possessed of a knowledge of the habits of the fish, the muskellunge angler should be afloat with the first hint or sign of light in the morning. He should hold to the deep water, casting shoreward, lairward. The ability to lay a long line and throw an accurate lure is tantamount to spelling the word "strike." I think the reader will understand me when I say that to be able to handle 150 feet of line is more than 50 feet in excess of 100. In fact, every foot of *controlled* line beyond 100 has all the value of two feet below the century. But note, I am always talking of *controlled* line. To be able to get out 150 feet of line, without being able to place the lure in the proper spot, is without value. Always cast from deep water to lair—obstruction and weed-bed—. Then, if a fish is hooked, the angler is in a position to coax his capture away from menacing obstruction out into clear fighting water. Furthermore, better casts can be made from the vantage ground of open lake or river. I have found the hours from earliest light to six or seven o'clock the most successful in fair weather. While August is not the best month of the year by any means for muskellunge fishing, still even August may be made to yield a goodly fish or two, if the angler is abroad by three o'clock of a hot morning.

Next in importance to the morning hours are those from six o'clock—evening—on to dark, sometimes beyond. One of my largest fish was taken from a lake out from State Line, Wisconsin, just at dusk the last of August. That fish was captured from the shore. We had been casting around the lake from a boat, and though we had worked from six o'clock on, not a single muskellunge had come to our lures. Running

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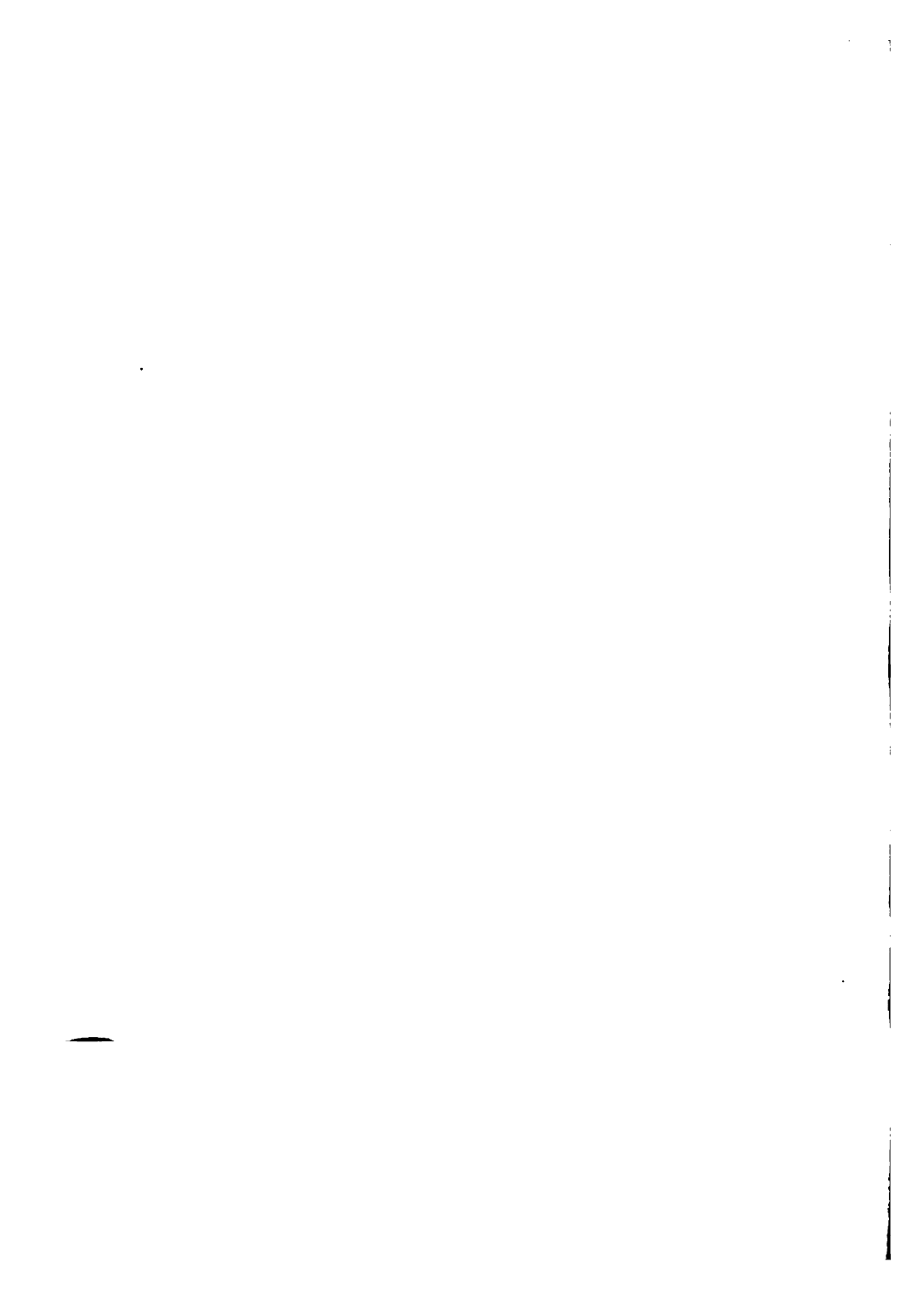
immediately preparatory to going into camp, I said to my companion, "Now I am going to send this plug out into the darkness once, just for luck." "Look out," he warned, "or you will hook a log. There is one out there I saw it when first we made camp." But I cast my surface lure and began slowly to reel. It was one of those war plugs that submerge when drawn through the water. Instantly there came a shock, a sudden stopping of all movement. "Hit your log, all right!" I exclaimed. What my companion said I will not repeat, for he thought it was going to be up to him to take the boat and go out and feel around in the darkness for the hooked lure. Then the log came to sudden life and things were doing there on the shores of that darkness last. For twenty minutes I—we, for my companion was an able second—played that fish and landed him. At camp he weighed slightly over nine pounds. While I was handling the rod, I would have sworn to almost any weight above twenty pounds. That he escaped what a marvelous story I would still be telling of "the big one that got away!" Probably by this time he would have weighed somewhere in the neighborhood of forty pounds.

Perhaps the reader noticed in one of the foregoing paragraphs I was careful to emphasize the fact that the early morning is the best time for casting artificial lures in fair weather. Now the emphasis is on the word fair. In foul weather there is no necessity for early rising. A windy day, whitecaps rolling, raveled remnants of storm clouds scudding across the sky, shutting out the sun—under such conditions, fish all day long. Very good for trolling. In midsummer now and then occurs a variety of day which well might be



A 44-POUND MUSKELLUNGE CAUGHT FROM
LAKE LE BOEUF

Courtesy "Outdoor Life."



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characterized as "pike day." I refer now to those mean, mizzling portentous days when the swine make shift at building nests and the barometer seeks the bottom of the glass. With the barometric conditions just right—which are all wrong—I have found the hours from eight to eleven the most successful for the muskellunge fisherman. A man may spend a whole month on a pike lake and never find just those conditions; but should he, he is elected to spend a few hours in an ichthyic paradise.

Several years ago I was spending three days on a locally famous lake in North Minnesota, more bent upon securing photographs and certain habit data than fish. But upon arising one morning I discovered that all nature shouted aloud of an oncoming atmospheric disturbance of some sort. Parenthetically: I have always been peculiarly susceptible to atmospheric influences. Often a very devil of unrest seems to possess me before the breaking of a midsummer thunderstorm. The more fearsome the tempest, the greater the forewarning physical disturbance. On the morning in question I left the camera in the tent, and alone with rod, reel, and case of under-water lures, set out upon the lake. We have it on no less authority than Kipling that at times trout are "jumping crazy for the fly." Be that as it may as regards trout, for two hours the muskellunge of that lake had lost all their shyness and moroseness. They were literally wild to take my lures. While as a rule the fish run small—under two feet—I took four good ones, one of which weighed thirteen pounds. Let him explain it who can, I only know that the hours preceding a summer thunderstorm are good hours, liable to be "high

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hours." Perhaps I should add that those hours of humidity upon the day in question were followed by one of the most terrific hail and wind storms it has ever been my misfortune to be exposed to. I stayed upon the water so long—as any true angler would have done under the circumstances—that I was just barely able to get on shore and under my inverted boat before the storm broke.

While midsummer is not the most successful time of the year by any means for muskellunge fishing, still the wise caster of lures can secure a few good fish if he knows how to handle tackle and is familiar with the habits of his game. Should he be so fortunate as to have the weather gods present him with a "weather-breeder," when the atmosphere is hot, close, and humid, with a misty haze veiling the sun, let him fare forth with rejoicing; for he should have a wonderful experience, and, if he be a taker of fish, make a record catch.

In this chapter I have said little of the *modus operandi* of lure handling and have listed no "best lures." The former is unnecessary, for I take it for granted that the reader is familiar with the author's "Casting Tackle and Methods," while the latter is out of my province. Any bait caster should know how to handle his lures before he goes in search of muskellunge. I have tried to get the reader to realize two things: first, that he must know his water; and secondly, that he must know the habits of the muskellunge, its likes, and lurking places. As was pointed out in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the particular type of lure is not so important so long as it is well made and strong. The color of the lure will depend largely upon the par-

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ticular water to be fished. I am acquainted with one lake where the yellow or perch-colored lure is the one to use. On a certain river I always use, because most taking, a green "Chippewa" under-water. Also, there are days when the caster will find the red and white in combination very taking. At present I would confine myself to those three colors—yellow, green, and red-and-white; that is, if going light. Though I had much rather have with me as wide and varied a selection of makes and colors as tackle-case and pocketbook would allow. Always I would carry duplicates of known attractive muskellunge lures in case of accident. Muskellunge are fish with which accidents to tackle, especially lures, are apt to happen. It is very annoying, to employ a mild term, to have a single lure prove very attractive, and then lose it.

CHAPTER XI

Muskellunge and Live Bait

"The best bait is a minnow, either alive or dead, though a frog answers very well. . . . Rowing along in water from five to ten feet deep, the bait should be cast as far as possible to the edge of weed patches, reeling it again very slowly; or, if the bait is alive, it may be allowed to swim outside of the water plants for a short time."—*Dr. James A. Henshall.*

IT IS not my purpose here to argue for the legitimacy of live-bait fishing; the method needs no defense. There are days and days when the best, almost the only successful lure for muskellunge is a small sucker, shiner minnow, or green frog. The angler who refuses to employ live bait may be compelled to depart from the fishing grounds without his "wasser-wolf;" and, while the modern angler does not fish for fish, he is human, and likes to take home with him ocular proof that he has been fishing. More reprehensible than taking fish with live bait is the final resort of some—fishing in the resort keeper's live-box with a "silver hook."

Probably no fresh-water fish are more addicted to a piscivorous diet than are the members of the *Esax* family. A large mouth, strong jaws, armed with a terrible array of long, sharp, conical teeth of various sizes, indicates that anything that walks, hops, flies, or swims will be accepted as food. That the muskellunge is one whit more predacious than pike of equal size is untrue; or that a six-inch chub or sucker will be

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more eagerly snapped up by the former than the latter, is also an error. However, in my experience at least, I have found live bait more successful with 'lunge than with great pike, probably because I more often employ it with the former than the latter. I think that a large muskellunge is more shy and wary than a great pike of equal size. It is easier to allay the suspicions of a wary fish with a natural bait than with an artificial lure, provided always that the angler knows how to handle live bait. Always, I think, muskellunge fishermen should resort to live minnows when fishing waters where muskellunge have become abnormally suspicious and wary. Then, too, there are days even on a comparatively wild lake when minnows are more attractive than any "plug," spoon, or pork rind.

I am not altogether sure that there is any great merit in a ten-inch fishlet, though I know a number of good 'lunge fishermen who have a very decided prejudice for that size sucker. I have experimented carefully for more than fifteen years, and must confess to a firm conviction that whatever advantage the ten-inch sucker has over a six-inch chub is more than offset by the difficulty in handling. I know of no seven-ounce wood rod that will stand up under the strain of casting a ten-inch sucker, and I am very certain that I would not want to subject my "De Luxe Bristol" to the abuse. When it comes to still-fishing—well, that is, of course, a different matter.* One could use a ten-inch fish for bait, provided he did not cast. There is no enjoyment nor sport in casting a young fish. If one must cast with so large

*See Appendix II.

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a live minnow, then let him use sea tackle, and be done with it.

For casting average-sized minnows and frogs, I use and recommend the regulation split-bamboo and steel rods, than which nothing can well be better. The tendency these days is toward lighter tackle in every department of angling. When salt-water fishermen essay the capture of denizens of the deep with cotton thread, it behooves the fresh-water angler to reduce the caliber of his line and the weight of his rod. Do not fasten to the hook a minnow so large that the rod will be jeopardized. A six-inch minnow in the proper spot from a distance with utmost finesse is going to bring results more often than the noisy "plop" of a large bait. All my experience has gone to prove that "distance lends enchantment," in 'lunge fishing as well as in some other things. It is well for the angler to remember that muskellunge are not in the habit of having their fish food come sailing to them through the air. In casting for 'lunge the ideal toward which the successful angler strives is lack of commotion, silence, naturalness.

I presume that every fisherman has his favorite bend of hook. I know that I have, and have had, any amount of fun poked at me by anglers who have a fancy for other makes. My hook of hooks is the square bend or "Sneck," as it is named in the catalogues. The hook should be quite large, 5-0 or 6-0, and provided with an eight-inch wire leader or gimp. It is unnecessary to add that the hook must be well made, hand forged, and "built on honor." A poor hook is always a poor investment. Sometimes a two-hook frog or minnow gang is used, which holds the

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minnow in position; but I like to fasten the minnow to the hook with a few turns of copper wire. Undoubtedly, the double hook, a hook to hold the head in position, is an aid. It will be objected that such a rig kills the bait. To which I would say that a minnow will not outlive a half-dozen 100-foot casts, anyway. Be sure the minnow is wired to the hook, if you are not well supplied with bait. Where the head is held by one hook and the trailer pierces the rear of the minnow, short-biting fish are apt to be hooked.

In hooking a minnow for casting, where a gang is not used, the hook should be inserted in the mouth, out through the gills, and back through the body. Quite often when so hooked, the minnow slips down and whirls when drawn through the water, and unless the swivel above the leader works easily, the line will twist and kink. The gang arrangement is more satisfactory, for, by hooking through the head with one hook and through the body with the other, the minnow is held in shape as long as it lasts. No caster need be told that under the stress of continuous casting a minnow will not last long. A simple hook through the head may tear out at the first cast. Of course, the fisherman soon learns to favor his bait in casting, starting carefully and slowing up easily.

A minnow quietly dropped at the edge of a weed-bed from a distance of 100 or 150 feet is almost certain to stir a 'lunge to attack if he be in a feeding mood. Few men can cast a live minnow with grace and precision these days, for correct minnow-casting is all but a lost art among us. I have before stated, and I wish to re-emphasize it here, there are fewer good casters of live minnows to-day than of lures.

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When 'lunge are feeding, however, there is nothing quite so "taking" as a minnow dropped at the edge of a weed-bed close up against the outreaching branches of a down tree, or near marsh grass growing shoulder-high in the water. Just why the plant *Pontederia cordata* was named "pickerel weed" I do not know; but I have discovered that a luxuriant bed of it in muskellunge water is a good place for the minnow-caster to let fall his bait. It is possible, once the knack is acquired, to slip the bait into the water with next to no commotion. Do not "slam" the lure down, as is the way of the caster of artificial lures, but, as it were, "ease" it into the water. Stop the reel gradually, not with a sudden, sharp pressure. There is more to the proper handling of bait than some casters realize.

After an angler has fished for muskellunge for a few seasons he will come to feel, to know by instinct, as it were, just where to cast. To the uninitiated this may seem to savor of potash, but it is a veritable fact nevertheless. I used to believe that this phenomenon could be explained in the realm of psychology, but now I believe otherwise. After casting four or five times into pockets, or at the edge of weed-beds exactly alike in appearance though distant from each other by many miles, and always being rewarded by strikes, a man will come to believe that muskellunge prefer to lie in certain places. A 'lunge lair is a 'lunge lair, and experienced anglers know them instantly. This is not saying that fish may not be found elsewhere, semi-occasionally almost anywhere, but the chances are that four times out of five a "muskie hole" will conceal a muskellunge. Casting at random with lure or live bait is not the method of the fish-

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wise angler. Random casting will get you about as far in 'lunge fishing as random work will get you anywhere.

I remember a small lake in Minnesota, the home of what some of my friends call the "real muskellunge," or *Esox immaculatus*, the spotless form, where I had good fishing two springs and falls. At the upper end of the lake near the inlet, a log laid, with one end upon the shore and the other well out in the water. Wind and current had mined a deep hole under and behind the log. Youthful then in muskellunge lore, but otherwise somewhat ichthyic-wise, I "felt" it was a good place for a fish. My minnow landed just at the side of the log, there was a splash and boil, and I was *fast in the log*. Simply the fish had dashed around the log after seizing the hook, and so had hooked me solidly. I kept away from the spot until late evening, then got my fish. Three days later I took a second fish, though palpably smaller, from the same spot. Visiting the lake in the fall of the same year, I secured another muskellunge. During the two years I took no less than *seven fish from beneath that log*. It was the throne-room of all the muskellunge of the water, a throne-room held always by the largest fish taken by me. I there learned my first lesson, viz., there are certain spots which are natural 'lunge lairs.

The bait fisher—any variety of muskellunge fisher, in fact—will find the middle of the summer comparatively unremunerative. The "wasser-wolf" is not a lover of hot weather. While fish *are* taken in July and August, one cannot be sure of a bag, resort keepers to the contrary notwithstanding. Better far wait for the cooling days of autumn. In midsummer 'lunge are morose, surly, and lethargic, lying for hours upon

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the surface basking in the rays of the hot sun, or, as the guides say, "sleeping." When muskellunge are found lying upon the surface, there is little use in casting lures or dangling live baits of any variety.

Undoubtedly this midsummer habit of the fish has given rise to the "sore-teeth" story. Among anglers we find the belief quite prevalent that muskellunge either shed their teeth or are afflicted with some disease of the gums along about "dog days," which renders it next to impossible for the fish to take food. In different localities the superstition, if superstition it is, takes different forms. Sometimes one hears that the fish are found toothless, and again, that every tooth in the jaws is loose. Personally, I have yet to take a 'lunge with loose teeth, in any way needing a dentist. However, I did take one great pike with loose teeth in front. I have been unable to gain any information upon the topic from the Fish Commissions, the reply invariably being that, "We know nothing about 'sore teeth' in muskellunge." It would seem natural, would it not, that those engaged in the propagation of the fish would be able to throw some light upon the matter? I doubt very much if it would make any difference to the rank and file of fishermen should the fish savants come out with a statement that the "sore-teeth" belief is a superstition, a myth. One of the strongest arguments offered for the theory is, "The Indians believe it." Surely that is enough to curb the agnostic! Personally, I regard the matter with suspicion; I am an agnostic. I have never found a muskellunge or pike in need of a dentist's services. Still, I hope I am open to conviction.

Every angler at all ichthyic-wise knows that the

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teeth of a fish, even such a voracious fish as the muskellunge, plays a minor part in the securing of food. The only use to which they are put is the seizing and holding of prey; for mastication is something that a fish does not need to worry about. Nature has so provided that an accident to a few teeth is quickly repaired. Indeed, it is exceedingly doubtful if a wound in the jaw causes a 'lunge much, if any, trouble. More than a few times I have taken various members of the pike family with cruelly lacerated jaws and torn mouths, wounds that, from a human viewpoint, should have placed them *hors de combat*, and yet they were as voracious—sometimes with stomachs distended with recent captures—as perfectly normal fish. Fact of the matter is, it is extremely difficult to study fish; to *know* all about them. Our beliefs are largely theories.

My own belief is that the fish are half dormant during the heated term, a condition brought about by the warming water, rather than by any dental trouble; for when hot weather extends into September the fish remain as dormant, as inactive, as in August. As soon, however, as the weather cools off and the temperature begins to fall, the fish take on a new lease of life, assume a new interest in food. By October, when the leaves are painted gold and brown and there is a zest in the air, we find the muskellunge a different creature, eager and combative. Even the early days of November are wont to yield good 'lunge fishing, if the winter be not too early. Of the two portions of the year, spring and autumn, I would say by all means select autumn for a muskellunge trip. Even if autumn did not afford better fishing, because of its wonderful zestful days, it is the time to visit the North Country.

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When I first took up the matter of bait fishing for muskellunge, I promised to say something upon still fishing before I finished the chapter. Probably few anglers turn to still-fishing these days, for casting is more American; consequently when live minnows are resorted to they are employed exactly as are lures. I wish to say that there is a place for still-fishing with live bait in the muskellunge angler's scheme of things. Still-fishing is a sort of contemplative man's recreation. I think that if Izaak Walton lived to-day and fished for 'lunge, he would often resort to live bait as an adjunct to the still fisher's outfit.

I would not vary the tackle one iota unless it were to employ a slightly longer rod, like the six-foot six-inch "Henshall pattern," for instance; a longer rod than the 6½-foot will prove too long for the work required of it. The ordinary caster can be used felicitously, however. As I think I pointed out when writing upon live bait, a larger minnow can be used for still-fishing, even a ten-inch sucker upon occasion. There are ways and ways of attaching the minnow to the hook. The only thing the fisherman should remember is that the minnow must be kept alive as long as possible, and the hook fixed in such a manner as to reach the striking fish. Some anglers employ a large hook and thrust it through the body midway between the head and tail and just below the backbone. There are two reasons why I do not advise the method: The hook is in the very worst position for a rear-striking fish like the pike, and the minnow soon dies. To hook the minnow through the head, inserting the hook in the mouth and thrusting up through the top of the head, soon causes the death of the minnow,

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and a slow-biting fish is sure to cut off the bait just back of the head and therefore is not impaled. When the head hook is used there should be an auxiliary hook trailing beneath the body or wired to it, in order that a slow-biting fish may be securely hooked.

Personally, I prefer to hook my live bait through the cartilage of the lips only, having a trailing treble attached to the shank and wired to the body of the minnow just in front of the anal fin. There are minnow harnesses upon the market, but I prefer a simple wrapping of fine copper wire. So attached and handled carefully, a minnow, such as the creek chub or sucker, will live for some time. Swimming about in the water, they appear perfectly natural, even to an unusually well-educated muskellunge, a post-graduate of the school of the waters.

The methods of the still fisher are like and unlike those of the bait caster. While success will come to the man who remains at one spot fishing carefully—provided, of course, he knows a "muskellunge lair"—he runs a better chance of securing a fish by cruising slowly along, pausing for long minutes from time to time to let his live fishlet "fish out" some likely appearing spot. Naturally, quietness and stealth are important requisites. Therefore the angler should be able to handle his boat with skill or be accompanied by an expert boatman, one able to handle a paddle and keep his mouth shut. I know that talking cannot disturb a 'lunge, that the sound of conversation is not communicable to water, but I do not want any talking when I am still-fishing—for muskellunge, least of all.

The user of live bait must care for his minnows or

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they will soon cease to be live bait. A dozen minnows should be sufficient for a morning's fishing, and would not overcrowd the average bucket. Let the bucket be of the largest size possible, the double kind, with inner bucket of wire provided with an air chamber in the top, so that it can be placed in the water without danger of sinking. It is exceedingly difficult to keep minnows alive if the weather be at all warm, and an occasional immersion in the water is a healthful thing; at the same time the water in the bucket can be changed. In exceedingly hot weather a chunk of ice in the upper chamber is a good thing, though the average minnow pail is not built with sufficient room for a very large piece of ice.

When the angler has located good water, water known to contain fish, and with environment right, he can arrange his line with a float and sit down to invoke his soul. Say the water is twenty feet deep, the float will be attached to the line eighteen or nineteen feet from the hook. The bait then will swim just free of the bottom. The bait should be a large-sized minnow, preferably a sucker, just above which sufficient lead is fastened to the line to keep the bait down. The float can be anything, from a plain chip of light wood, sufficiently large to hold up the bait, to an enameled cork. I much prefer the latter, and I want it painted some bright color, so that I can see it through half-closed eyes. The cast should always be with the wind, so that the float will tug away from the boat. It is a simple way of fishing, but highly enjoyable for that very reason. Too much strenuosity in the fishing game these days.

In fishing along the edges of weed-beds or close in-

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shore where marsh grass grows out into the water, while the ideal position for the boat apparently is in the weeds, that is where the muskellunge lie, and should the angler hook a fish he would be in the worst position possible to play his capture. Members of the pike family know instinctively that a weed-bed offers a safe refuge, or perhaps they are in the habit of rushing to such spots to swallow their game; at any rate, the instant a minnow is swallowed the fish starts for a weed-bed if one be within reach. Consequently, I advise the angler to fish from outside—from the water side, allowing the minnow to swim toward the weeds or other shelter. If one work along with exceeding care he will not make any great disturbance; at least not enough to frighten the ordinary 'lunge. Let me again reiterate what I have said often: The angler should act as though every muskellunge could hear a whisper and see the flash of a rod from the distance of half a mile. "Absurd!" Perhaps, but the man who makes no noise, all else being equal, is the man who takes the fish.

I remember a little lake, or rather the arm of a large lake, out south from Manitowish, Wisconsin, in which ten years ago one could find muskellunge of length and avoirdupois. Those days the anglers fished the large lake, saying that the smaller one did not possess sufficient depth nor area to attract the werewolf of northern waters. I had discovered differently, but, angler-like, I kept my discovery to myself. My fishing was done, for the most part, in the two orthodox vacation months, July and August, because my vacation, like so many, always happened in dog days. I think I am safe in saying that I found live minnows

CHAPTER XII

Trolling for Muskellunge

"I know of old anglers who have experienced better things, who make long excursions in pursuit of Mascalonge, who will sit on a cushioned seat with a cushioned back in the stern of the boat, and suffer themselves to be pulled about all day, with a trolling-rod extended from each side."—*Thaddous Norris*, 1864.

TO-DAY the most expert muskellunge fishermen, those who derive the most pleasure from the pursuit of the "wasser-wolf," do not resort to the long rods to which that early angling writer, quoted at the head of the chapter, refers; neither do they employ the heavy hand-line so much affected a quarter of a century ago. The day of the short rod and multiplying reel even for muskellunge trolling has arrived. It is not unusual to see a fisherman with a cane pole sticking out over the stern of his boat, to which a line of equal length with the pole is attached, rowing slowly around the edge of the lake. However, either he is one of those seldom individuals who hold all modern angling methods in contempt, or he has not yet arrived at the more satisfactory, scientific, and successful method of trolling. As to the old-fashioned hand-line, one will not see it in use on fresh water these days, unless in backwoods districts by the natives.

The advantages of the long line and reel have already been set forth in the chapter on trolling for great pike, and need not be repeated here to any extent. The farther away from a boat the spoon travels, the

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more likely it is to attract a fish; that is too obvious to need remark. A trolling-spoon traveling 150 feet behind the boat will capture five fish to every one taken on a lure whirling twenty-five feet beyond the disturbing oars. I know whereof I speak. The limit of distance obtainable with a cane pole unprovided with a reel would be, I should judge, about twenty-five feet. With an 80- or 100-yard reel, the fisherman can handle 200 feet of line with ease, character of the water permitting. With the ancient heavily weighted hand-line, which was whirled about the fisherman's head to gain sufficient momentum, a muscular man could cast perhaps fifty feet. But think of the labor involved, as well as incontinently dragging in a royal fighter. Does it not appeal to the reader as somehow unfair? Oh yes, the hand-liner may cut his fingers on the line, may even fall out of the boat—that is easy when learning how to swing the weighted line about the head, a somewhat difficult task—but after all, his method is not attractive to the lover of rod and reel.

I once had a friend, a gray-haired hand-liner, who has long since gone to the reward of all good fishermen, who had a rather amusing experience. We were on a short driving trip, looking for blackberries in a trout and muskellunge country. I leave my readers to guess why my ancient friend led a blackberrying party into a good fishing country. One night we went into camp on the shores of a beautiful little lake which, my friend confided to me on the side, was "jest full of muskie." After camp was made and everybody settled for the night, he and I set out on a hunt for some sort of craft. At last we found an ancient, rotten, leaky Indian

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out for the shore, fortunately only a few rods distant. That I watched his progress with apprehension is true, for he was many years young. Looking back across the years, I can see that brave old gray head bobbing up and down as it made slow progress shoreward, and it was with utmost relief that I at last saw him stand upright, feet upon the hard bottom. Standing in breast-deep water, he played his capture to exhaustion, then dragged it to land, where I was given the high privilege of striking the quieting blow. How large the fish was I do not remember, for in those days I kept no notes and carried neither scales nor tape; but it was large enough to supply a noble feed for a large crowd of hungry blackberry pickers.

I must pause a moment longer, long enough to pay a word of tribute to the memory of my old friend. When I knew him, he was well down on the western slope of the divide, bathed in the mellow sunlight of his departing day. He had no use for "new-fangled notions and fishing contraptions," but he was a true, fair-play-loving sportsman from the crown of his silvery hair to the soles of his life-weary feet. Never would he take a mean advantage of any fish. One rod or line was all that you could get him to employ, and he would not even ground-bait for carp! Here is to you, gentle guide of my early manhood. May the fishing "over there" be as satisfying as that which you enjoyed here, and may I have the pleasure of angling with you in the sweet bye and bye.

There is no need for a lengthy discussion of the rod and reel adapted to muskellunge trolling, for the reel and rod recommended for great pike trolling is the one to employ. As I have pointed out time and

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again, the 'lunge is no more gamy and tackle-testing than the great pike, inch for inch and pound for pound, popular notions to the contrary notwithstanding. If the angler desires a slightly longer rod than the regulation casting rod, he can select it, though I would warn him to add inches with circumspection. Personally, I use my short caster for trolling usually and ask nothing better.

My trolling reel is my favorite make of level-winding winch, than which there is nothing better. The line is a regulation casting line, well cared for and tested each time before setting out upon the water. There might be an added advantage in an unusually large reel, if the angler were fishing water sufficiently clear of weeds and other obstructions to allow an unusually long line. My regular casting reel will spool eighty yards of 28-pound test line with ease, which, in all conscience, is enough. A spoon from 150 to 200 feet distant is far enough away to attract the most wary muskellunge that ever lurked in weedy fastness.

I will not spend much time discussing the type of spoon, for the true angler will employ his favorite in spite of anything I, or any other fishing editor, may say. Then, *your* favorite type or make of spoon, for the simple reason that you will handle it more faithfully than one with which you are unacquainted. Therein lies the mysterious power of a certain rod or lure—the angler's faithfulness and care in using. My favorite type of spoon is the old-fashioned fluted or kidney, with the "Slim Eli" a close second, all well made and trustworthy. There is no necessity for an overly large blade, provided the hooks are dependable and a long wire leader attached; the well-built

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hooks to hold the fish, and the wire leader to prevent an over-striking 'lunge from severing the line above the spoon. The pearl spoon is very attractive from man's viewpoint, though I have yet to be convinced that it is equally attractive to muskellunge. While I have never seen a pearl spoon broken by the onslaught of a 'lunge, the possibility has always deterred me from investing in it to the exclusion of the old silver or nickel blade. It is a good plan to carry blades of various colors when going to unknown waters, for there are times when a copper or "gold" blade shows up to better advantage, owing to the color of the water or character of the bottom. Still, day in and day out, there is nothing more attractive than the bright nickel blade, painted a brilliant red on the inner surface.

I am often asked regarding the value of an ornamented hook—feathers, red rag, etc. Undoubtedly they possess a certain attractiveness. I have experimented somewhat at length and am free to say that I have found the feathered hook more alluring than the one devoid of covering. The angler has but to observe a feathered hook traveling through the water at the rear of a spoon, and then one without such ornamentation, to understand why a great pike or 'lunge will take the former in preference to the latter. There are times when, if the angler add streamers of red and white cloth three or four inches long, he will find that his lure has an added attractiveness from the fish's viewpoint. Then, too, the buck-tail treble is a good attachment for a spoon, especially if it have a tag of red in the center. The action of the hairs as the lure moves through the water is very alluring. All in all, I would say by all means cover the hooks.

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In trolling there should be no necessity for a weight or sinker, the long line burying the lure deep enough. In trolling, always allow the lure to travel as far behind the boat as is safe, for it is the distant spoon which lures the most 'lunge, all else being equal. With sufficient line out, the fisherman must have a care or his lure will be hooking the bottom. The boat should move just as slowly as is safe, just fast enough to keep the lure playing free and no faster. Therein lies the secret of success—slow trolling.

Perhaps I should say here, while I do often troll for great pike and muskellunge, I turn to the method for rest from more strenuous casting, not because I prefer the method to casting. I much doubt if trolling will bring as many fish to gaff as will casting artificial lures, though there are days when a distant spoon will accomplish wonders. This I would have the reader bear in mind: There is no single best method of angling for 'lunge; he must adapt himself to conditions. The wise angler is ready and able to handle casting lures, live bait, or trolling-spoon as the exigencies of the fishing may demand. Adaptability is as valuable in muskellunge angling as anywhere. Any fisher should be willing to alter his methods, forget preconceived notions for the time, much more the 'lunge fisherman.

There is little use in trolling or fishing with any sort of artificial lure when the surface of the water is glassy, unruffled by breeze or wind. Every trout fly-fisher has discovered how useless it is to flip a fly upon the surface of a glassy pool in midday, and so also the 'lunge angler will discover that his best lures and spoons will prove unattractive when the surface of the lake is a dead calm.

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I remember fishing one of Wisconsin's northern lakes some seasons ago, a lake from which the writer and others have taken some good muskellunge. On the day in question the surface of the water was perfectly still. Not a ripple nor shade of ripple roughened it to the slightest degree. I cast, I still-fished, I trolled, but all to no purpose. The best hours of the day passed—that is, from 4 A. M. to 7—and I fished fishless. Retiring to an island in the center of the lake near the south end, I prepared to while the time away with a book. Early rising and the sun made me sleepy, and soon, the book proving unattractive, I rolled over in the shade and dropped asleep. I slept some two hours or so before "a going in the trees" awakened me. A high wind had sprung up from the south and was kicking that lake into a very fury of rage. Fortunately for me the island was comparatively near the south end of the lake; otherwise I would have been marooned for the day or until the going down of the wind. Quickly launching my boat, I set out for the south shore, paddling into the teeth of the gale.

More from force of habit than otherwise, I set my rod in the holder and let out some 100 feet of line, a matter which required considerable skill, as I was under the necessity of keeping my light craft bow to the wind. Once with sufficient line out, I bent all my energies to facing the waves. Time and again a white-cap broke on the bow, spraying me disagreeably. With all my attention centered on the paddling, I gave little thought to the trailing spoon. Suddenly there came a jerk so strong and mighty that my little craft hesitated in its course perceptibly. Though click

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and drag were both set upon the reel, line was ripped off yard after yard. I could not pause in my paddling to take the rod in my hand. For once my go-alone proclivity had gotten me into trouble. I began to fancy myself in the condition of the man who wanted someone to help him let go the bear.

I paddled straight for shore, shouting lustily, hoping against hope that the three good men and true, in camp beneath the trees, were at home and would hear my cries. After what seemed an interminable time, a slouch-hatted figure sauntered down to the water's edge and bawled, "What's eatin' you?" "Fish, muskie, whale!" I shouted in return. Fortunately, my campmate was quick to grasp the significance of things and soon a good, stout boat was putting out to my rescue. I was compelled to hand my rod over to them—taking on board a boatman was an impossibility in that sea—and so they landed my biggest 'lunge of the season. Now comes the moral of the tale: We took seven good fish that windy day, trolling along the shore. Let me add that seven good muskellunge is a bag any quartet of anglers can be proud of anywhere.

I have found in muskellunge fishing that success depends quite largely upon the condition of the weather. Hot, sultry days, with no sign of wind, are apt to prove poor fish days, save very early in the morning, and not always then. Upon the other hand, raw, cold days, with high wind, are likely to prove very successful. The wise angler will not spin yarns by the campfire just because the weather is rough.

In the foregoing narrative I have mentioned my rod-holder, a simple contrivance, which is of utmost worth to the go-alone fisherman. Indeed, I do not

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see how it is possible to safely troll without it. To lose a rod overboard is a disaster, even though the fisherman is fortunate enough to hook on to the line, as I once was. Let me say also, that once I threw overboard an expensive casting rig, and though we angled away for days it still lays in the silt on the bottom of the lake. Two men can troll together with advantage, the man with the rod sitting in the seat, facing the stern. He is in the correct position to watch his rod and play the fish. I do not like a hired boatman; would much rather fish, turn and turn about, with a brother angler.

As to where to troll, all depends, of course, upon the feeding grounds and weather. In windy weather the fish seem to roam a great deal. Either the good fish are more scattered, or the movement of the water makes the muskellunge restless. Ordinarily the troller should skirt the edges of weed-beds, follow the shore if the water is deep enough, work out the sandbars, not forgetting the mouths of inflowing creeks. Probably the most likely territory is that of the weed-beds, for there the minnows and small sunfish live, and the muskellunge haunt such places. Upon occasion it seems almost as if a man can take 'lunge anywhere, but even as accidents happen in the best of regulated families, it is an accident. The angler acquainted with the habits of his quarry and the water is going to take fish, where the mere tyro will never get a rise. Knowledge is power, it is said, and I know that *knowledge* spells *muskellunge*. Of the two important requisites—fish knowledge and good tackle—the first is of greater importance. I do not belittle good tackle; but just the same, unless the fisherman knows something of the

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habits of the fish he seeks, all the tackle in the world will not make him a fish-getter. While Fate, Luck, or whatever it is that does such things, may present the veriest novice with a record fish on the first day out, she is not going to continue her unreasonable gifts day after day. It is the angler who knows his fish, the water, and how to handle tackle that continues making large catches.

Much might be written upon the way of the muskellunge with a spoon, without exhausting the topic, for it is one of utmost interest to fishermen. As a rule, the spoon or lure is taken with a rush, from the rear, though now and then a seldom fish will steal upon the lure and "mouth" it carefully. I have seen a 'lunge follow a spoon right up to the boat without offering to touch it; even lie in plain sight for some seconds after the lure has been lifted from the water. Such fish are hard to hook. At times it is possible to tease or exasperate them into biting. Simply retrieve the lure with short, sharp jerks; make the fish believe that unless it strikes at once, the glittering tidbit will escape. Nevertheless, some fish cannot be made to bite. I have seen a good-sized muskellunge follow a lure curiously here and there, eyeing it malevolently, but never offering to touch it. I am not just clear as to the reason for the action. Perhaps the fish is not hungry, or perhaps it has had some sore hook experience, though that would be attributing memory and a rather high grade of intelligence.

There is little necessity for the angler's "setting the hook," once a muskellunge strikes the lure, though some good fishermen do swing the rod sharply to right or left, as the case may be. A taut line should be main-

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tained; otherwise the capture may shake out the hook. His leaps are not like those of the black bass. Indeed, they are not leaps at all, strictly speaking; simply wallowings on the surface. I have yet to see my first 'lunge or pike *leap clear of the water*. When pulled strongly, the muskellunge comes to the surface, plunging about in a tackle-testing way. Obviously the proper thing to do with so heavy a fish is to play him on a taut line. Over-eagerness is suicidal. Ofttimes an angler says his fish escapes because insecurely hooked, when the truth of the matter is the rodster tore the hook out by main strength. The angler need not expect a brilliant battle from the muskellunge, but he should look for a well-sustained and steadfastly conducted struggle. Never underrate the ability of a hooked fish—any fish—much less the 'lunge. Always play a fish until he shows the white flag in surrender, then gaff quickly, lest he "come back" before you are ready. Quite often the 'lunge surrenders all at once at the end of a sustained rush or after wallowing for some seconds upon the surface. But do not be deceived. There may remain in that long body rushings and wallowings galore. I have known fish to surrender incontinently after the first rush and come to gaff meekly. Again, I have known fish to come to life at the first prick of the gaff, smash tackle, break loose, and escape.

One tactic of the 'lunge, which the fisherman must guard against, is to dash under the boat. The rod must be lifted out and away from the side of the craft, or a broken joint will result. The angler always has a safety-valve in his reel. Give line easily and with tension. In playing so heavy a fish as the muskel-

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lunge, all depends upon the fisherman keeping his head. Never for a moment should he lose control of the battle. It is easier to fight an offensive battle than a defensive one. A good motto for the muskellunge fisherman would be, "Do unto the 'lunge as he would do unto thee, but do it first."

And so here is to you, you king of fresh-water fishes, you "wasser-wolf" of the Northland. May you long survive the wiles of the eager fisherman, disport yourself in the clear, cold water you love so well, so that coming generations may have the exquisite pleasure of doing battle with the most satisfactory pike that swims.

CHAPTER XIII

The Fine Art of Pike Cooking

"But if this direction to catch a Pike thus do you no good, yet I am certain this direction how to roast him when he is caught, is choicely good, for I have tried it. . . . This dish of meat is too good for any but Anglers or very honest men; and I trust you will prove both, and therefore have trusted you with this secret."—*Izaak Walton*.

IF Father Izaak was right, then I need not apologize for this chapter, e'en though I realize that I have no business invading the sacred precincts of the culinary artists. What I do not know about cooking would fill more than a single chapter. Still, I can make shift to cook a meal in the open and can prepare pickerel, great pike, and 'lunge sufficiently well for the sharp outdoor appetite. I want it distinctly understood, however, that primarily this chapter is not intended for cooks who possess the conveniences of a kitchen. Housewives are requested to treat this dissertation as the priest did the man who fell among thieves. With this sad attempt at an apology, I plunge into my subject.

I honestly think that members of the pike family have not received their just dues at the hands of outdoor cooks. Even the execrated and despised pickerel—"river snake"—does not deserve the odium heaped upon him. Not only is he edible, but when taken from moderately cold water and properly cooked, I hold him delicious. I realize full well that the fore-

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going statement will stir some anglers to wrath, may even bring me acrimonious letters by the dozen. Nevertheless I am ready to stand by my guns, or rather, fry-pans. Quite recently I was out with a friend, a despiser of all pickerel—to most people any pike under fifteen inches is a pickerel—and at noon we took two small fish, real river pickerel, which I fried for dinner, and my friend not only pronounced them good, but went so far as to say they were "almost as delicious as trout." The fact of the matter is, I would about as soon eat pickerel as rainbow trout when both fish came from the same water, were it not for the fine bones in the former. Naturally, a pickerel from a warm, sluggish slough, thoroughly impregnated with decaying vegetable matter, will be "off flavor." Upon the other hand, the same fish taken from clear, cold rivers will possess firm, sweet flesh. The great disadvantage of the pickerel or any small pike, from the eater's viewpoint, as has already been pointed out, is the numerous bones. Just why all fish cannot be built on the framework of a trout, it is hard for a lover of fried fish to understand. So far as I can see, a trout handles itself as well as the sucker, say, and the latter's flesh is often nothing but a sort of animated pin-cushion of small, sharp bones, sometimes bound up into little bundles, as it were.

Any fish is better food immediately upon taking from the water than after standing exposed to the air and sun or even being placed on ice. If this be true of such cold-water lovers as the trout, how much more must it be true of soft fish like the pikes. Upon taking from the water, if intended for food, any fish should be killed quickly and mercifully; not allowed to flop

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its life away on the hot boards of a boat bottom, or strangled to death at the end of a string dangled behind the boat. If pike are to be retained for any length of time, they should be put in a live-box or killed at once and placed upon ice. Always remove the gills, eviscerate, and wipe the body cavity clean, using a wisp of grass, or better, a dry cloth. Be sure all the reddish-brown substance from along the spine—"kidneys"—is removed. Remember, moisture will hasten decomposition. If to be used immediately, then sever the head and wash out the body cavity with as cool water as can be found, drain and wipe dry; then place in the cooking vessel at once. I know of nothing more unappetizing and repulsive than a slimy basket of improperly cared-for fish.

The pikes will not keep as well after being scaled; but personally, I prefer to scale my fish before leaving the fishing grounds whenever possible. I never take home more than enough for a single mess, at the most two, and nine times out of ten eat them on the shores of the river or lake from which taken. Of course, if I were going to ship any great distance I would leave the scales on. In scaling, one can use an ordinary knife, though one with a serrated back to the blade, like that advertised by the Marble Company, is very convenient, and any of the so-called "fish-scrapers" are efficient and take up but little room in the tackle-box. In a permanent camp nothing is better than a regular currycomb such as horsemen use. At the best, cleaning of scaled fish is a disagreeable job and any aid is very welcome. I have not said that fish scale easily when first taken from the water, a matter which should be emphasized. Of course, a dry fish can be

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soaked so that the scales can be removed, but such soaking does not improve the flavor of the meat. A pan of slimy, blear-eyed pickerel is not a pleasant task to front, and it stands to reason that fish, soaked for two or three hours in water more or less foul in washings from the other fish, cannot be in the best of condition for food. The point I am trying to make is this: The flavor of any fish flesh depends to a large degree upon the care which an angler has bestowed upon his catch. I am convinced that one reason why my friends find "Smith-fried" pickerel delicious is because of the care the fish have received before they feel the heat of the fry-pan. It is not all, nor half, in the cooking. The proof of the pudding may be in the eating, but the proof of the eating is in the preparation.

A pickerel may be cooked in any of the ways that other round-bodied fish may. No pike lends itself to planking, though it can be accomplished after a fashion before a slow fire, if the fisherman-cook has plenty of time at his disposal and can possess his soul in patience. I shall give but one method of cooking pickerel, for, after all, he is too small to bother with when larger fish can be secured, and anyway, the angler can use the methods for pike and 'lunge if he so desire. Now I will tell how I fry pickerel, great pike, or even small 'lunge. My friends say, you remember, they are "almost as good as trout."

"SMITH-FRIED" PICKEREL

We will suppose I have caught two fish some fifteen inches in length, killing as soon as caught and giving them time to bleed. The scales are removed and, if

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time and utensils serve, the bodies are immersed for some thirty minutes or so in a salt bath, a treatment especially advised for fish from sloughs or water impregnated with decaying vegetable matter. Lacking time, the fish are thoroughly washed in as cold water as is obtainable, wiped dry, and salted. Three or four slices of bacon are placed in the fry-pan and the fat extracted. I remove the bacon and place on a warm plate near the fire. Now while the fat is smoking hot, I drop in the fish, cut up into convenient pieces, and fry, being careful not to burn. (Strictly speaking, this process is not frying, but, as the cooks say, "sauting." No more do I fry fish in deep fat.) I remove the fish from the pan to the warm plate and, if obtainable, squeeze over it the juice of half a lemon. The despiser of the "river snake" will be surprised at the tastiness of the dish.

The outdoor cook may vary the dish in many ways. The flavor imparted by dropping a slice or two of onion in the fat is relished by those fond of the esculent bulb. A judicious dash of red pepper or other aromatic condiment will add variety. If the pickerel cook is working where watercress (peppergrass) can be gathered, a few fresh sprays should be served with the dish. While I prefer bacon fat for frying fish, there are folks who do not like the flavor. For them olive oil or sweet butter is preferable, though for the woodsman bacon is the only thing. To my mind, the secret of successful "frying" lies in having the fat piping hot and the fish dry. While I have advised cutting up the fish, if the pan is large enough or the fish small enough they can be fried whole. I know of nothing more appetizing in appearance than a couple

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of pickerel browned to a nicety and served with a garnishment of peppergrass, gathered hard by the home of the fish. I would not roll pickerel in cracker crumbs, because of the fine bones the eater encounters; otherwise crumbs are an improvement.

If one uses cracker crumbs, they should be prepared beforehand at home. It is a good plan to save the left-overs of bread, thoroughly dry, and pulverize. This can be done with a rolling-pin or meat-chopper; then pass through a fine sifter so that the crumbs will be of an equal size. After pulverizing, dry out thoroughly in the oven. They will keep indefinitely, if kept dry. A small sack in the outfit will be found convenient when needed. In order to use crumbs successfully, the cook should have an egg batter in which to dip the fish before rolling in the crumbs; otherwise the crumbs will not adhere to the fish. The foregoing applies to the frying of any pike, save that a large fish must be cut into rather thin slices, not over an inch thick, to cook successfully.

BAKED GREAT PIKE

Perhaps there is no more delicious way to serve a large great pike—the larger the better—than to bake it. So cooked, as Walton would say, "he is choicely good." For baking, one should catch nothing smaller than a five-pound fish; a ten-pounder would serve better. Once I had the privilege of preparing half of a twenty-four-pound great pike and, take my word for it, the result was a dish fit for an epicure. Parenthetically: One can imagine a hotel range of sufficient length to accommodate a thirty-pound fish, but the reader must remember that I am writing of out-

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door cooking, and my reflecting baker is but eighteen inches long, therefore the big fish must be served in halves—let us hope, quarters.

With a reflecting baker it is possible to cook a fish to a nicety before an open fire, for the heat can be absolutely controlled. All other cooking should be done at a separate fire. The more coals and the less flame the cook has the better job he will do. It is a wise precaution to have a little pile of small twigs ready, dry as tinder, so that should the heat diminish, the fire can be quickly started up again. Then, too, a hot fire at the last will give the body that delectable brown which is so inviting even to jaded appetites.

The fish should be dressed as described for frying and cut to fit the baker. Remove the head, as it takes up so much room. Place the fish in a dripping-pan, having first thoroughly anointed the surface of the body with bacon drippings or butter and seasoned to taste. A slice or two of bacon should be placed in the body cavity and one or two in the pan. Butter or drippings can be used. Cook slowly; otherwise the meat will be dried out and rendered flat and flavorless. The secret of cooking before the fire is care. Do not allow the pan to cool, nor yet burn the fish.

This dish can be varied by "stuffing," if the cook so desires and possesses cracker or breadcrumbs. Stale bread can be used. Moisten the bread with cold water, kneading with the hands. Squeeze out all the water possible. Add a lump of butter the size of an egg, or bacon drippings. Season with salt, pepper, and sage, or finely chopped onion. The addition of finely chopped bacon is an improvement, whatever the other seasoning. If the cook is partial to oysters and has a

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can of "coves" in the commissary, they can be chopped up or used whole, as fancy may dictate, and used in place of the bacon. Endless variations will occur to the mind of the natural outdoor cook. This "stuffing" can be placed in the body of the fish and the opening closed with several windings of string, or it can be heaped in one end of the pan. Some people like the "stuffing" well browned. So cooked, the flesh of a great pike from the north country or muskellunge is dry, flaky, sweet, and toothsome. A better and more tasty dish it is hard to imagine.

A sauce is not needed for baked pike, but can be prepared, of course, if the cook so desires. There are any number of sauces, though a simple butter sauce may serve for the base. Put two large tablespoons of sweet butter in a pan and add a tablespoon of flour, a teaspoon of salt, and a liberal dose of black pepper. Rub these ingredients together until thoroughly mixed, then add about half a cup of boiling water, place in a fry-pan and cook two minutes, and pour over the fish. This can be varied by the use of milk in the place of water; or, the butter can be melted in the pan, and when it bubbles, add the flour and cook thoroughly; remove from the hot fire, but keep simmering and stir in the milk slowly. This makes a white sauce. Chopped onions, chopped watercress, pickles, green peppers, in fact any highly flavored relish can be added; young wild mustard leaves are not half bad. It is simply wonderful the amount of vegetables the woods afford, vegetables that can be eaten in the place of well-known domestic varieties, and that can be used for seasoning and garnishes. Personally, I do not much care for a sauce for baked fish, for baked

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pike needs no addition other than the outdoor appetite to make it palatable.

BOILED GREAT PIKE

"Why should anyone boil a pike?" methinks I hear someone ask. Well, if a party is spending a week or two in camp, a change of diet is desirable and welcome. If conservation of food becomes necessary because starvation lurks behind every tree, then boiling is in order to retain every atom of life-sustaining elements in the fish. Even the water in which the meat is boiled can be drunk. May that never be the reader's portion. "But to return," as the Chautauqua lecturers say. Undoubtedly boiled fish as a regular diet, would pall upon the appetite, but for a change now and then it will be greeted joyously by hungry campers, especially so, if well and toothsome prepared.

The larger the fish, the better. Cut up into convenient sections for the camp kettle, carefully tying each piece in a cloth bag if procurable, so that the flesh will not fall apart and be "lost" in the broth. Have the kettle two-thirds full of *boiling* salted water (note the emphasis upon the word "boiling"), to which the juice of a lemon or a gill of vinegar has been added. (If on a hard trip, citric acid in crystals will be carried in place of either.) Boil slowly until done (about eight minutes per pound). Of course if the cook has any cooking pot of so unwieldy a shape as to fit the body of a pike, he can cook the fish whole. Onions, spices, or horseradish can be added to the water, if one likes highly seasoned dishes. The camp epicure will demand a sauce. Directions for making one have already been given.

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PIKE CHOWDER

I have said, "Fish chowder is more enjoyed in prospect than in actuality. To my mind, this is one of the dishes to which distance lends enchantment." That was written before I *knew*. Culinary is one of the progressive sciences. I have learned how to make fish chowder.

Cut up several slices of salt pork—I use bacon usually, though it is not orthodox—and fry in the kettle in which the chowder is to be made. Now the real chowderist would use nothing but an iron kettle, though the migratory camper will employ his aluminum kettle. Have ready, sliced, one quart of potatoes and onions. When the pork is fried, the "juice" extracted, add the onions, then the potatoes, and water enough to just cover the vegetables. When half cooked, taste to see if salt enough; if not, add more, and a dash of pepper. If fond of highly seasoned dishes, a dash of red pepper will give a "kick." Lay the fish, cut into convenient pieces, on top of the vegetables and cook. By cooking the fish on the vegetables, the flesh does not come to pieces as it does in the old method, scattering through the ingredients. When cooked, add milk and serve. In using evaporated milk it, of course, must be used in a dilute form. Some do not like the milk flavor, and for them it can be left out. This is a delicious dish.

PLANKED PIKE

While the shape of a pike does not lend itself to planking, it can be accomplished with a little care. Secure a plank of sweet hardwood two or three inches thick and long enough to accommodate the whole fish.

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Just a word about that plank. One can split it out of a tree, though the green wood will steam slightly and render the flesh too moist. By far the best plank I have ever employed was a bit of wreckage rescued from Lake Superior. It is easy enough to find wood that can be used, along the shores of any large body of water. Somehow the soaking seems to give the wood a cleansing and sweetening that it otherwise does not have. Of course the plank must be dry in order to secure best results; if wet, it must be laid away to dry. In a permanent camp the board can be kept from season to season, with proper care. In migratory camping the fisher-cook will be compelled to put up with a poorer plank. Now for the planking of a pike.

Dress the fish, leaving the head on. Cut down the back, severing the ribs on one side close to the spine, and spread out the fish, fan-shape, skin side to the board, and nail securely. A number of nails will be required, for as the flesh cooks it falls away. I have covered the fish with a coarse wire screen nailed to the board. Worked well. Screen should be of white wire and thoroughly cleansed, certainly. Of course the fish will be salted and peppered to taste. It adds to the flavor, I think, to pin several slices of bacon along the backbone. Set the board up before the fire lengthwise and tend carefully, keeping an even heat, turning the fish often. Baste with a slice of bacon fastened to a twig, holding it so that the drippings will run over the fish. The secret of successful planking is care, a slow fire, and patience. Serve on the plank on which cooked, garnished with peppergrass, if it can be secured, for its wild flavor is an improve-

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ment. A well-planked pike is a dish fit for a hungry fisherman. Save the plank; you will use it again.

PIKE BAKED IN CLAY

Here again it is possible to cook a whole fish, though this method requires greater skill and forethought than even the former. The first thing necessary is the right kind of clay—red or blue. The second requisite is the right kind of fire. Dig a long trench, considerably longer than the fish, fill it with hard wood, and burn down to coals. Keep this up until the trench is full of glowing coals; pile on some more hardwood, lots of fuel, and go out and catch the muskellunge or great pike, the larger the better. I put building the fire first, for the cook cannot successfully—I nearly said artistically—clay a large fish without first having had a hot hardwood fire for at least six hours. The ground—preferably sand—around the trench must be hot and plenty of ashes and glowing coals all about. Obviously a one-day stand is no place for clay-baking. Time, patience, care, and right conditions are all essential to success.

Granted we have the right variety of brick clay. Mix a mortar, somewhat moist. Lay the fish down in the soft clay without scaling or eviscerating. Rub a coating of the wet clay *against* the scales, filling the gills and mouth. Do not use too much mortar for the first coat. Dry by the fire for a few minutes and repeat the operation. Two or three—perhaps more—coats will be required before the fish will be sufficiently well encased. Dry between each coat. When the whole fish is covered with a sheet of clay an inch or so thick, lay it by the fire ten or fifteen minutes, turn-

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ing now and then so that it will properly harden, and the fish is ready for the trench. Rake out part of the coals and lay the pike in its warm bed. Cover with coals and ashes. A large pike will bake in from two to three hours. The more clay added to the body the longer it will take to cook and the more certain the results. A good fire should be maintained on top of the trench. When everything is ready, the hungry fisherman waiting to be served, dig out the brick, crack open with the camp ax, remove the backbone and "innards," the latter shrunk to a little ball, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and eat. The uninitiated will be surprised and delighted with the tooth-someness of the dish. As I said of planking pike, so I say of this method of cooking: All depends upon the cook's thoroughness and attention to details.

Perhaps some of my readers will think I have gone into this matter of cooking with too much thoroughness, while others may complain that I have not been thorough enough. The angler who cares for nothing but catching fish will have found this chapter more than tedious, should he have read so far, while the angler-cook—and he is constantly on the increase—will regard this as the most worth-while chapter in the whole work. When "Trout Lore" first appeared, more people wrote me about a certain method of cooking trout therein described than regarding any other topic, unless perhaps it was fly-tying. The fact of the matter is, the dyed-in-the-wool angler is an embryonic cook, interested in all toothsome ways of serving his captures. To delegate the cooking of fish in the open to the guide, be he ever so expert, is not the most enjoyable way. He who would sap the last

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drop of the juice of enjoyment from his sport should be able to cook in the open, not merely make shift at it.

The angling writers of a day long since passed always added a chapter upon cooking to their tomes upon the pleasures of angling. "The Book of the Pike," by H. Cholmondeley-Pennell, published in England in 1865, gives in the appendix many receipts for cooking pike. Also in the more recent volume, "Pike and Perch," one of the "Fur, Feather, and Fin Series," the English author sees to it that his readers are provided with a very interesting disquisition upon "Cookery of the Pike and Perch," going back in the history of the art to the day when pike was spelled "pik," and book, "boke." Cookery is as ancient a "sport" as angling itself, and a sport where one runs as great chances as in playing a twenty-pound muskellunge.

So I come to the conclusion of my self-appointed task, a task that has been a pleasure. I wish here to thank all my friends throughout the country for their many kindnesses, letters of advice and gentle criticism. If I have produced a work worth while, no thanks are due me; the credit is all yours. So here endeth "The Book of the Pike," with a characteristic sentiment from that oldest book upon angling, "A Treatyse of Fysshynge Wyth an Angle:" "*The pyke is a good fysshe: but for he deuouryth so many as well of his owne kynde as of other: I loue hym the lesse.*"

APPENDIX

I

The Possibility of Hybrids Between Great Pike and Pickerel

[NOTE.—I am indebted to *Forest and Stream*, of New York, for the privilege of republishing here this chapter, which originally appeared in that well-known outdoor periodical. Also I am indebted to the *Journal of Heredity* for the facts, as well as the cut, with which it is illustrated.—AUTHOR.]

Every angler who has given any thought to the matter cannot fail to be impressed with the great likeness between the pickerel and the great pike. For, as has been pointed out in the foregoing pages, were it not for the squamation of the cheeks and gill-covers, not always could an observer be certain of any given specimen. The reader has learned that color and form are not sufficiently constant to serve as a certain identification. This being true, the possibility of a cross or hybrid has undoubtedly suggested itself to the thoughtful mind of the angler. It is a matter of record that supposed crosses have been discovered in nature in one or more characters, fish showing a condition intermediate between great pikes and pickerels. Of course when those specimens have been taken, the question has arisen whether or not such fish are mere "sports," a mutation, or the actual result of cross-fertilization. Undoubtedly few crosses, comparatively speaking, occur in nature, for nature is more careful in such things than is man.

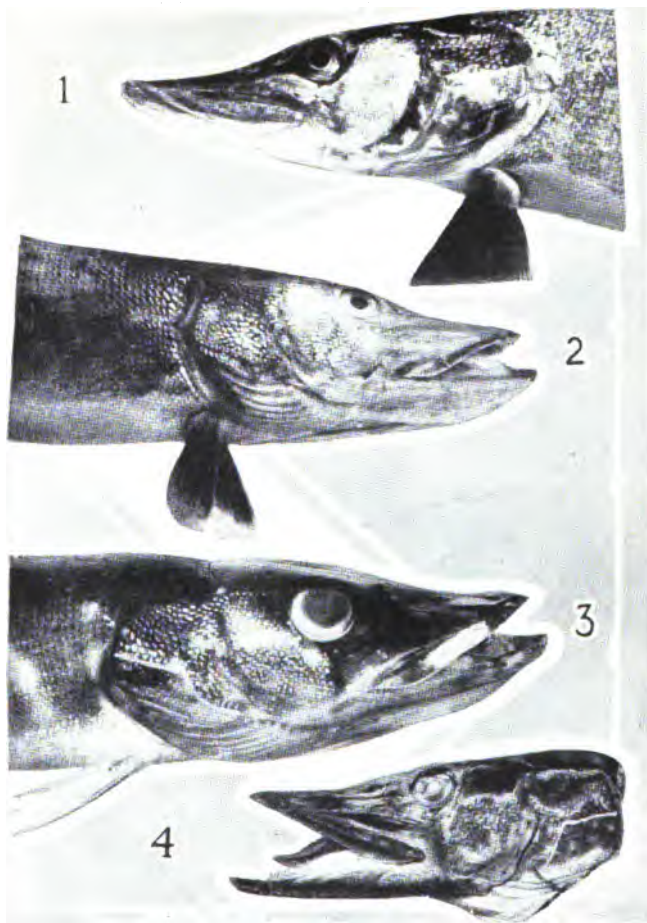
When this paper appeared in *Forest and Stream* it brought the writer any number of letters and criticisms, favorable and otherwise, some anglers maintaining that a cross was an utter impossibility, while others had "caught lots of them." It is difficult to say which attitude of mind is the most reprehensible.

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There would seem to be no good reason why cross-fertilization might not quite frequently occur between pickerels and great pikes, unless nature has endowed them with a great and insurmountable antipathy for each other, for structurally and in habits they are essentially alike. At the time of spawning, a ripe female, companioned by one or more males, swims about erratically over the shallows or inundated marshes. Eggs and milt are ejected from time to time, here and there, each ejection being accompanied with violent tail lashings and bodily contortions, effectually distributing both milt and eggs over a considerable area. Now as great pike and pickerel spawn at practically the same time (indeed, spawning pickerel have been observed crossing the path of spawning great pike more than once), suppose this crossing should take place at the proper moment, it is inconceivable but that some of the eggs from both species of females should be impregnated by the milt from the males of opposite species. Would such accidentally impregnated eggs "hatch" and develop into fish? It was to answer the question satisfactorily that Mr. G. C. Embury, of Cornell University, conducted a careful and lengthy series of experiments, as reported in the *Journal of Heredity* for October, 1918. I now quote from his article:

"On March 30, 1917, the eggs from a 30.5 cm. pickerel having typical characters were artificially pressed into a moistened pan and covered with milt from a male pike likewise typical of its species. The reciprocal cross was not attempted. About 70 per cent of the eggs developed normally, and those not preserved for future study hatched in from six to ten days. A few of the young were reared in an aquarium to lengths varying from 3.8 c., to 6.4 cm., after which they were transferred to a small newly made artificial pond of stagnant water. When six months old, three specimens were captured and gave lengths of 15.2, 13.8, and 9.1 cm., respectively."

This is of utmost interest, for it proves that cross-fertilization is possible, at least artificially. Furthermore, in the artificially produced hybrids the scaling



HEADS OF PIKE, PICKEREL, AND HYBRIDS

1. Head of adult pike. Extent of scale covering on operculum (gill-cover) indicated by white line.
2. Head of adult pickerel, operculum fully scaled.
3. Head of artificially produced hybrid.
4. Head of supposed hybrid, captured in Cayuga Lake, N. Y. White line indicates extent to which scales cover operculum.

Courtesy "American Journal of Heredity."

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of the gill-covers is extended down on the portion joining the cheek, as never occurs in the true great pike. (Study the illustrations taken from the *Journal of Heredity*.) In other words, the squamation of the hybrid partakes both of the nature of the great pike and pickerel. The supposed wild hybrids have exactly the same squamation. Therefore it seems almost safe to conclude that if the angler should be so fortunate as to capture a fish with the peculiar scalation given in the illustration, he would be justified in concluding that he had a hybrid pickerel. It would be exceedingly interesting to know if the hybrid would reproduce, a matter I deem exceedingly doubtful, for the chances are it would prove a "mule" (infertile). If it did reproduce, would its progeny partake of the characteristics of the hybrid, or would it "throw back" to either the pickerel or great pike form? There seems to be no answer. (A friend of mine who is a trout breeder has carefully selected albino trout, strong and vigorous fish, hoping to reproduce them, but he insists that they are infertile, a matter which I can but doubt until further evidence in support of his claim be brought.)

In coloration the hybrid, which the reader understands is an immature fish, resembles the immature great pike much more closely than it does the immature pickerel, the diagonal light bars with dark areas between them being distinct in the first two and totally lacking in the last, the markings being those of the so-called "chain pickerel." If these markings are constant, the fisherman should have little difficulty in differentiating between the great pike minnow and the pickerel minnow, though he might easily be confused if given a great pike and hybrid. The author, upon whose findings I am basing this paper, holds that the chances are in favor of the mature hybrid resembling quite closely the mature great pike, the resemblance being so striking in the immature specimen. One examining the illustrations accompanying

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the original article in the *Journal of Heredity* cannot help being impressed with the similarity of the head of the artificially produced hybrid with that of our well-known "wall-eyed" pike or pike-perch. I have shown the picture referred to to a number of anglers and all have asserted that it is a "wall-eye" without doubt. Yet it was the artificially produced hybrid. Of course it may be the fault of the photographer, for I know how difficult it is to reproduce the marking of fish faithfully with a camera. In this case the head is undoubtedly much nearer the camera than that of the adult pickerel.

The author concludes his article with the following "Summary of Finding," which it is worth our time to give verbatim:

"The overlapping spawning time and the spawning behavior of the pike (*Esox lucius*) and the pickerel (*Esox reticulatus*) are such as to permit of the possibility of a natural cross.

"The eggs of the pickerel may be artificially impregnated with the milt of the male pike and may develop into healthy hybrids.

"Artificially produced hybrids and supposed natural hybrids are identical in scalation of the opercula, showing a condition intermediate between typical pickerel and pike.

"Typical adult pike and supposed natural hybrids are identical in color pattern.

"Juvenile pike and the artificial hybrid are identical in color pattern.

"Thus there is a probability that mature artificial hybrids will resemble in color pattern the supposed natural hybrids.

"These facts seem to favor the assumption that pike and pickerel occasionally cross."

Since my paper appeared in *Forest and Stream* I have had the pleasure of examining carefully two specimens, both of which I am firmly convinced in my own mind were crosses. One I took myself, while the other was shipped from Minnesota for identification, the thought of the gentleman who sent it being that it was "a new variety of wall-eye" (pike-perch). In both cases there was a very decided wall-eye "cast of countenance," something which I find of great interest. Indeed, one might easily have passed both

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of the fish as sauger or sand pike (*Stizostedion canadense*), a small form of the ordinary wall-eye, were it not for the fins and color. A careful examination instantly disclosed how un-wall-eye-like they were, going to prove how easily any careless observer might be fooled as to the identity of a specimen.

You who have read the preceding pages of this book know how similar the pickerel and great pike are in habits, therefore you are not surprised to learn that artificial hybrids have been produced, and will not be surprised if some time you take a great pike or a pickerel differing in squamation from any other fish on the string.

II

A Day's Still-Fishing for Great Pike With Live Bait

It seems wise, even though I have written of still-fishing for muskellunge, to recount the happenings of a day's still-fishing for great pike, with a few suggestions regarding the tackle and methods employed.

I had long considered the great pike a fish to be taken with cast lures, cast live bait, and trolling spoons, though I had never resorted to still-fishing methods with minnows. Just why is not exactly clear in my own mind, as I look back over my ichthyic experiences. There was no thought in my mind that still-fishing was unsportsmanlike, for long ago I came to the conclusion that sportsmanship consisted of something other than tackle. Probably the chief reason why I had not resorted to still-fishing was because action, movement, effort, have always appealed to me. I got to thinking over the matter, the result being that I resolved upon investigating the merits of still-fishing for great pike. The lake to which I turned my attention was a much-fished Middle West body of water, one from which now and then a good fish was lifted, but only semi-occasionally, because the great pike were very wary as the result of much persecution. I got my minnows, then waited for a "pike day."

The securing of good minnows for still-fishing for so large a fish as the great pike is something of a problem. In still-fishing the angler can use comparatively large minnows, from six to eight inches long—young fish in fact. One will not undertake to catch such bait with a minnow dip-net, nor will he, unless, fortunately situated, resort to a seine. About

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the most successful—I nearly said only—method is to fish for bait with a hook and line. Probably the most taking bait is a small bit of angle worm, though bait minnows can be taken with an artificial fly. By the way, the taking of bait minnows with a 2½-ounce fly-rod is not a poor sort of sport in itself. More than once I have gone after bait minnows in the morning with my lightest mountain-trout rod and become so enamored of the sport that I have fished for minnows all day long. A creek with deep pools is almost certain to offer chubs six to ten inches long, and the one provided with a sufficiently large pail will have little trouble in capturing a dozen or two in short order. (I have just touched this matter here, as I have in preparation a book upon live-bait fishing.) Now to turn to my great-pike fishing.

I watched over my dozen chubs with jealous care while waiting for the advent of a perfect "pike day," but come at last it did, as do all things for which we wait long enough. I recognized "der tag" when I rolled out of bed in the morning. We had been treated to a thunderstorm some time during the night, and when the sun came up he looked out over a rough lake, while the wind chased the raveled remnants of storm clouds across the sky. I hurried through my breakfast, and, with that old reliable "six-foot-six" bait rod, tackle-box, and pail of minnows, I was soon bounding over the angry waves, for the wind had cuffed them till they foamed with rage. One must have a rough sea in order to secure the most remunerative still-fishing.

I chose my location just off a long line of weeds, a lily bed, where the water was fifteen or twenty feet deep, perhaps deeper. I saw to it that I selected my position so that the wind would blow me off-shore. Then I let go my anchor and my boat bobbed and dodged at the end of her rather lengthy tether. You see, if worst came to worst (which would be the crowning of the best) I could sever my anchor cord and be blown out to sea. I could get away from the anchor

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by a simple slash with my knife in case I connected up with one of the mythical "big ones," in which case an anchor rope might lead to as disastrous an entanglement as the murder of some tin-crowned prince in a two-by-four country. The reader may smile at my forethought, but to it I attribute the successful issue of more than one ichthyic struggle, and in this case—but read on.

I have already said the rod was the old tried and true "six-foot-six," though it might have been the regular caster or long cane pole, though if the latter, then fitted with reel-bands and line guides. Personally, I prefer the shorter rod for the fishing. My reel was a large level-winder, the one that happened to be cleaned and in perfect condition, and there was a second in my tackle-case, in case of accident. It held eighty yards of line. My hook was large, No. 7-0, provided with a ten-inch piano-wire gimp and swivel. I placed a float on the line in such a position that the hook would almost reach the bottom, but not quite. There was such a sea running that I found it necessary to attach two large sinkers. I know it sounds like "shark tackle," but, after all, a big great pike is a sort of shark, in nature, at least.

I selected my minnow from the pail, an eight-inch chub, that reddish-black variety, with little warts or knobs on its nose, called locally "horned dace." I thrust the large hook through the body of the bait about midway between head and tail and below the backbone. To pierce the latter would be to kill the bait, and I desired that it remain alive as long as possible. Hooked, I tossed it into the rough water and the waves quickly carried it away from the boat, out as far as I would allow it to go. I had a rod-holder in my tackle-box; it I fastened to a boat-seat, slipped the rod in, and settled back to rest, invoke my soul, and admire the view. The reader will readily understand that the waves tossing the float or "bobber" up and down kept the bait in motion. That is one reason why I selected a windy day, though, as every

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pike fisherman has discovered, all pike roam far and wide in search of food in stormy weather.

I could not keep my eyes fixed on the red-and-green float for the life of me, the ever-changing panorama before me proved so attractive. The angry black water, streaked with long, white streamers of foam, looking not unlike the streamers of clouds whipping across the sky, formed a picture, the like of which I have never seen on canvas. How many "storms at sea" our art galleries display! But whoever yet saw a wind-blown lake? I was the only fisherman out, therefore I had the water to myself, a little matter for which I think I was duly grateful.

Perhaps half an hour or more passed before the float dived beneath the surface, though I did not know the precise moment when it disappeared, only I looked for it and it was gone. Quietly I took the rod from the holder, "felt the fish," discovered it was on, and set the hook. Instantly that line came to life. To anyone who has had a lurking suspicion that my tackle was unduly heavy, I can only say I wish you had held that rod. If any doubt the gameness of the common every-day great pike, are tempted to call him a "miserable pickerel," to them I can also say, I wish you had held that rod. It was a great battle while it lasted, and when at last I brought the six-pound great pike alongside the dancing boat and placed a .32 bullet right between his eyes, I was well satisfied with still-fishing with live bait for great pike, not imagining what a wonderful experience Dame Fortune held up her sleeve for me. It is a fact that good fortune as well as ill fortune is more than apt to repeat. One seldom catches a single fish.

Once more I baited up, which is always an interesting and important operation, for the minnow must be properly impaled in order that it may live as long as possible; for while a dead minnow, kept in motion by the tireless waves, will catch great pike, one swimming freely is far and away more attractive. The hook must be thrust through in such a position that the

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minnow will balance as perfectly as possible; otherwise, when it dies, it will hang head down or tail down. "Too particular," did I hear you say? Well, my particularism has given me fish when the other fellow failed, so I continue being particular. I watched the float bob away, knowing that the uneasy minnow down below could but prove attractive to any foraging great pike moving about. So I thrust the rod into the ready holder and settled back in my easy seat, for I had seen to it that I was provided with a back-rest. No necessity for being uncomfortable when one might just as well be comfortable.

The minutes slipped unregarded by, for I had all the time there was and was not impatient. That is one of the beauties of still-fishing. One can invoke his soul and think his thoughts without interruption. So small and unimportant an object as the green-and-red "bobber" could not hold my attention with the wide lake open before me. The clouds were thickening up, perhaps hinting of more rain before night, though the constantly freshening breeze seemed to preclude that contingency, and it was blowing from the southwest, too. A pair of loons came toward me, bobbing over the water, facing into the waves in a way that made me envy their power. Even while my eyes were fixed upon them my "bobber" must have gone down, for when I turned my attention to the fishing, the float had disappeared and the line was running from the reel gently.

I jerked the rod from the holder and attended to the reel forthwith. The click and drag had not been sufficient to hold the fish, the waves making enough noise to prevent my hearing the click's warning. Though nearly all the line was gone, no harm resulted, and I brought that great pike back where he belonged in short order. It was quite a battle, owing to the heavy sea, but the rod conquered, as it has always had a habit of doing, and I settled the old fellow with a pill from the .32 and added him to my string, after the scales said he weighed a flush five pounds. I was

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a wee bit disgusted to discover that the fish were running smaller, and I mentally promised myself that, if the third should be off another pound, I would quit, urged to the decision by the constantly increasing wind and roughening lake.

The third minnow, a fine big sucker all of nine inches long, was committed to the deep without ceremony and taken off by something before it had reached the bottom; taken with a rush, too, that submerged the float and ripped yard after yard of line from the reel. I baited up once more, only half interested in the game, for the waves were really too obstreperous for my craft, and it was large and stable. Hardly had the fourth minnow touched the water than it was taken in a manner that left no doubt as to the fish's intent. As the rod was not yet in the holder, I gave the butt with all the force I dared, and no one can convince me, however impossible it may be, that I did not *feel* that hook go home. I knew I was fast in a good fish. And the battle was on.

Before I realized it I discovered that I was drifting away from the weed-bed—that I was adrift. The anchor rope had broken. It was just as well, for if that fish circled the boat once, he circled it a dozen times. My line was new and my hook, hand forged. Neither did I tremble for the piano-wire leader. It came from a tackle house whose name is a passport for quality. The only thing that worried me was the mounting sea, already well past the safety mark. I would have given almost anything for a boatman. For once it seemed that my go-alone proclivity had gotten me into serious difficulty. Eagerly I looked about for some chance boatman, without being rewarded, and I told myself bitterly, "You are the only fool out here to-day." Fortunately the boat did not upset, though the waves splashed in until everything was soaked. The revolver I slipped into the pocket of my waterproof coat in order that it might be dry when needed, though I wondered if I should ever use it. It was a great battle, not so much on my side as

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on that of the fish. He did the fighting, I sat and held the rod. Even if he did the fighting, I could see that he was tiring, a matter for which I think I was sufficiently thankful.

In time I began to catch glimpses of his white belly through the waves as he rolled with them, and I was glad; for we were approaching the shore, and I only prayed that the boat might remain afloat until I reached shallow water. And Fates, the Red Gods, whatever you please, were on my side that day. The fish was not destined to escape, and I was. Suddenly I could catch glimpses of the sand, and with a great shout of relief I stepped out into the waist-deep water and started for the shore, the fish lunging and plunging behind. It was not a very satisfactory, a very sportsmanlike finish, but the tackle was good and the fish unusually big. I just run him up on the sloping bank, where I literally fell upon him and held him down while I sent the quieting shot into his brain. The fight was over, the fish mine. My boat came in, a-swash, it is true, but with all my paraphernalia safe, though soaked.

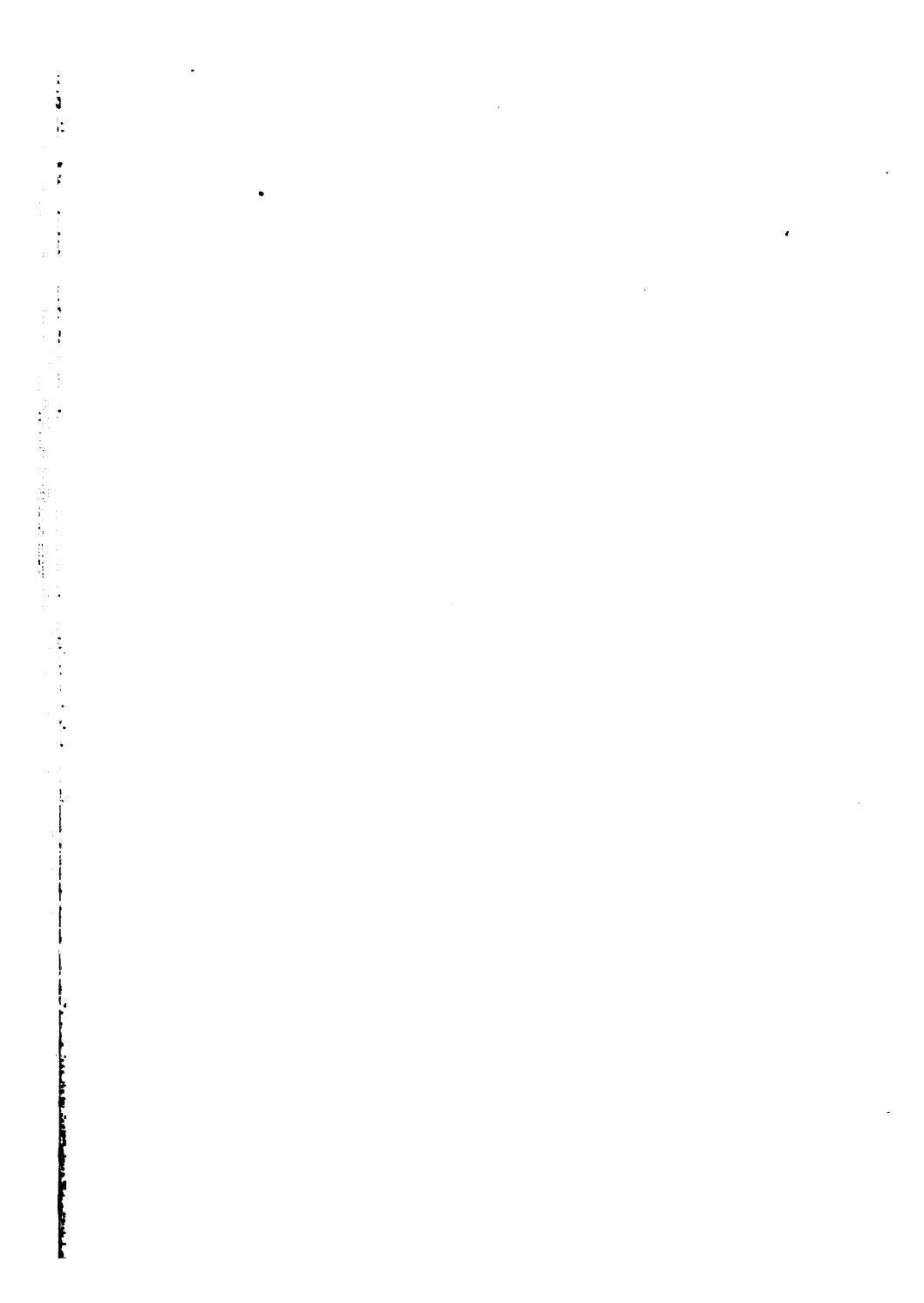
Eagerly I fished out my scales, shook the water out of them, and lifted the great fish up. With astonishment and gratification I gazed upon the marker—29½ pounds. It must be written out in capital letters—TWENTY-NINE AND ONE-HALF POUNDS! That, too, after I had written "The Book of the Pike." Do you wonder, reader, that this story finds a place in the appendix? Surely you will agree with me that without the story of the undoing of my largest great pike, this volume would be incomplete.

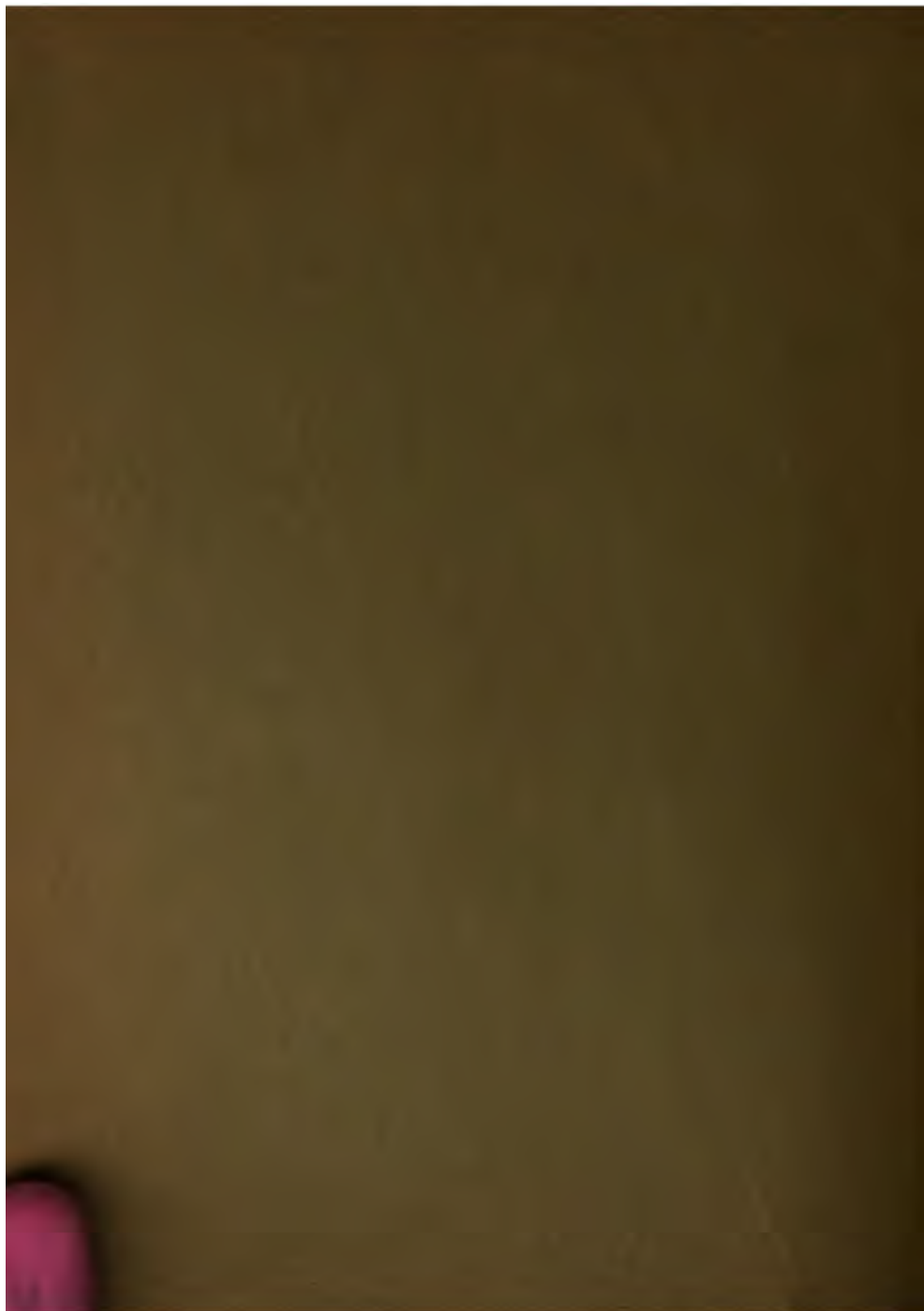
ADDENDUM

My self-appointed task is done. Another volume of the series of fishing books I have in mind is about to leave my study to journey to the publisher and the public. It is my book no longer. And I strangely find myself loath to let it go, so much of myself is written into it, bound up in it. I think it is something like the experience that comes to us when our girls grow up, marry, and go away into the world. Something has gone out of our lives, ours yet, but ours no longer. This book is yours, reader, and when you reach this page I hope and trust you will have enjoyed your journey one-half as much as I did mine, blazing the trail. You have found things to criticize and you have found things to praise. Be kindly in the first and moderate in the latter, and I shall be satisfied. Little book, good-bye. It does not seem to-night that I can love the book I shall begin upon to-morrow as much as I do you. But be that as it may, I shall always have a warm place in my heart for you. Again, little book, good-bye.

THE AUTHOR.







JUL 25 1977

